

Brian A. Brown, Marian H. Feldman (eds.)

Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art

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Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art

Edited by
Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman

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Contents

Acknowledgements —	V
Contributors —	XI
List of Illustrations —	XIX
Editors' Note —	XXVII
Map 1 —	XXVIII
Map 2 —	XXIX

Marian H. Feldman

Introduction —	1
-----------------------	----------

I. Defining the Field

Lamia al-Gailani Werr

Archaeology and Politics in Iraq —	15
---	-----------

Oscar White Muscarella

Forgeries of Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts and Cultures —	31
---	-----------

Constance von Rüden

Beyond the East-West Dichotomy in Syrian and Levantine Wall Paintings —	55
--	-----------

Ann C. Gunter

Orientalism and Orientalization in the Iron Age Mediterranean —	79
--	-----------

II. Technologies and Practices of Artistic Production

Silvana Di Paolo

The Historiography of the Concept of “Workshop” in Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology: Descriptive Models and Theoretical Approaches (Anthropology vs. Art History) —	111
--	------------

Allison Karmel Thomason

The Impact of the “Portable”: Integrating “Minor Arts” into the Ancient Near Eastern Canon —	133
---	------------

Francesca Onnis

The Influence of the Physical Medium on the Decoration of a Work of Art: A Case Study of the “Phoenician” Bowls —	159
--	------------

Yelena Rakic

**Impressions of the Contest Scene: Glyptic Imagery and
Sealing Practice in the Akkadian Period — 185**

Joanna S. Smith

Histories of Cypriot Art through Seal Carving — 205

III. Text and Image

Cory D. Crawford

Relating Image and Word in Ancient Mesopotamia — 241

Karen Sonik

Pictorial Mythology and Narrative in the Ancient Near East — 265

Jennifer C. Ross

**Art's Role in the Origins of Writing: The Seal-Carver, the Scribe,
and the Earliest Lexical Texts — 295**

Melissa Eppihimer

Posthumous Images and the Memory of the Akkadian Kings — 319

Chikako E. Watanabe

Styles of Pictorial Narratives in Assurbanipal's Reliefs — 345

IV. Social Identities

Sarah B. Graff

**Sexuality, Reproduction and Gender in Terracotta Plaques
from the Late Third-Early Second Millennia BCE — 371**

Amy Rebecca Gansell

**Images and Conceptions of Ideal Feminine Beauty
in Neo-Assyrian Royal Contexts, c. 883–627 BCE — 391**

Aubrey Baadsgaard

**Uniforms and Non-Conformists: Tensions and Trends
in Early Dynastic Fashion — 421**

Stephanie M. Langin-Hooper

Terracotta Figurines and Social Identities in Hellenistic Babylonia — 451

Mark B. Garrison

The Impressed Image: Glyptic Studies as Art and Social History — 481

Brian A. Brown

Culture on Display: Representations of Ethnicity in the Art of the Late Assyrian State — 515

V. Religion, Ritual and Politics

Claudia E. Suter

Human, Divine or Both? The Uruk Vase and the Problem of Ambiguity in Early Mesopotamian Visual Arts — 545

Tallay Ornan

A Silent Message: Godlike Kings in Mesopotamian Art — 569

Anne Porter

When the Subject *is* the Object: Relational Ontologies, the Partible Person and Images of Naram-Sin — 597

Paul Collins

Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Violence: Warfare in Neo-Assyrian Art — 619

Jean M. Evans

The Tell Asmar Hoard and Rituals of Early Dynastic Sculpture — 645

VI. Making and Defining Space

Alice A. Petty

A Feast for the Eyes: Depiction and Performance of Ritual within the Sacred Space of Middle Bronze Age Ebla — 669

David Kertai

The Art of Building a Late Assyrian Royal Palace — 689

Ann Shafer

The Assyrian Landscape as Ritual — 713

Javier Álvarez-Mon

**Aesthetics of the Natural Environment in the Arts of the Ancient Near East:
The Elamite Rock-Cut Sanctuary of Kurangun — 741**

Henry P. Colburn

Art of the Achaemenid Empire, and Art in the Achaemenid Empire — 773

Index — **801**

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List of Illustrations

Frontmatter

- Map 1: Map of the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean showing regions and sites mentioned.
- Map 2: Detailed Map of the Ancient Near East showing sites mentioned.

Lamia al-Gailani Werr

- Figure 1: Procession Street, Babylon.
- Figure 2: Letters and envelopes souvenir folder depicting the Lyre of Ur and Khalid al-Rahal's rendering of the head of Shuba'ad, a Sumerian queen.
- Figure 3: *Ishtar My Love*.
- Figure 4: Nebuchadnezzar and Saddam as builder.
- Figure 5: Saddam with bow and arrow.
- Figure 6: Postage stamp, Saddam and Saladin.
- Figure 7: Presidential Palace, busts of Saddam.
- Figures 8a–b: Victory Arch.
- Figure 9: Stele of the Vultures.
- Figure 10: The March of the Ba'ath.
- Figure 11: Iraqi republic symbol.

Oscar White Muscarella

- Figure 1: Left: Beaker excavated at Hasanlu; Right: A forgery.
- Figure 2: Left: Excavated beaker from Marlik; Right: A forgery.
- Figure 3: Left: Achaemenian relief; Right: A forgery.
- Figure 4: Forgery of a Sassanian plate.
- Figure 5: Plunder Chart.
- Figure 6: Left: Excavated at Hacilar; Right: Two forgeries.
- Figure 7: "Ziwiye" ivory plaque forgery.
- Figure 8: Gudea statues: Left, Detroit Museum of Art; Right, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Figure 9: Iranian vessel with added scene.
- Figure 10: The "Memphis" stela.

Constance von Rüden

- Figure 1: The Investiture Scene, Court 106, Mari.
- Figure 2: Bull's horn with bichrome sequence of three ribbons in the reconstruction of Niemeier and Niemeier.
- Figure 3: Depiction of grass in movement.
- Figure 4: Depiction of architectural elements, house 39/A, Alalakh IV.
- Figure 5: Reconstruction of the notched-plume motif at Alalakh as a griffon.
- Figure 6: Wall painting of room 10, Tall Burak.
- Figure 7: Miniature landscape of Tell Kabri.
- Figure 8: Reconstruction of the west wall, Qatna.
- Figure 9: Reconstruction of the south wall, Qatna.

Ann C. Gunter

- Figure 1: Oinochoe in "Wild Goat" style, Rhodes, ca. 630–600 BCE.
- Figure 2: Bowl with sphinx frieze, Phoenician style, 9th–8th century BCE; found at Nimrud.
- Figure 3: Bowl with figural friezes, Chios, ca. 600 BCE; found at Naukratis.

Figure 4: Figurine of goddess. Athens, Dipylon cemetery, Late Geometric, ca. 750–725 BCE.

Figure 5: Ram-headed situla. Gordion, Tumulus MM, ca. 740 BCE.

Allison Karmel Thomason

Figure 1: Jewelry from the grave of Queen Pu-abī from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, Early Dynastic period, as illustrated in Frankfort 1996: 64.

Figure 2: Copper cultic stands from Tell Agrab, Early Dynastic period, as illustrated in Frankfort 1996: 54.

Figure 3: Stone vessels with shell, lapis and carnelian inlay from Khafajeh, Early Dynastic period, as illustrated in Strommenger 1964: pl. VI.

Figure 4: Stone head of a woman from Uruk, with inlay missing, Uruk period, as illustrated in Strommenger 1964: pl. 30.

Francesca Onnis

Figure 1: The various arrangements of decorative space of the “Phoenician” bowls according to their shape.

Figure 2: Bowl BM N.65, from Nimrud, Northwest Palace.

Figure 3: Votive shield Heraklion Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 7, from the Sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Ida.

Figure 4: The various arrangements of the decoration in the registers of the “Phoenician” bowls.

Figure 5: Bowl Heraklion Archaeological Museum inv. no. 2316, from the necropolis of Fortetsa, near Knossos, Crete.

Figure 6: Bowl National Archaeological Museum of Athens inv. no. NM X 7941, from the sanctuary at Olympia, Greece.

Figure 7: Bowl Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin AM 14117, from Golgoi, Cyprus.

Figure 8: Bowl Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.51.4555, from Cyprus.

Yelena Rakic

Figure 1: Lapis lazuli cylinder seal from Adab and modern impression: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Ur-Tur, ensi of Adab.”

Figure 2: Serpentine cylinder seal from Adab and modern impression: Multiple Figure contest composition with inscription, “Dudu, ungal.”

Figure 3: Diorite cylinder seal from Ur and modern impression: Group of Four contest composition.

Figure 4: Shell cylinder seal from Ur and modern impression: Group of Five contest composition.

Figure 5: Drawing of clay sealing from Tello with impression of a cylinder seal: Early Dynastic IIIB Multiple Figure contest composition with inscription, “URU-KA-gina, king of Lagash.”

Figure 6: Front and back of clay envelope from Nippur with impressions of a cylinder seal: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Ur-Suen, the scribe.”

Figure 7: Front and back of tablet without text from Umm el-Jir with impression of a cylinder seal on the front: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Warad– son of–.”

Figure 8: Front and back of clay bulla label from Adab with impressions of a cylinder seal: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Shar-kali-sharri, king of Agade. Tuta-shar-libbish, the queen; Ishar-beli, her majordomo, is her servant.”

Joanna S. Smith

Figure 1: Map of Cyprus showing sites mentioned in the text.

Figure 2: Greenish-gray soft stone cylinder seal and its modern impression from Kition, Cyprus.

Figure 3: Layered images on the cylinder seal from Kition shown in figure 2.

- Figure 4: Stages of carving on five cylinder seals from Kition, Cyprus, showing the earliest traces of carving at the top and the latest forms of carving at the bottom.
- Figure 5: Comparison of the locations of the woman, griffin, and tree in the layers on recarved cylinder seals of soft dark stone from Episkopi-Bamboula.
- Figure 6: Drawings of the layers of carving on three soft dark stone cylinder seals from Enkomi Area III, Level IIB.
- Figure 7: Greenish-gray soft stone cylinder seal and its modern impression from Enkomi, Cyprus. Recarved at least once to include the seated figure.
- Figure 8: Drawings of two soft black stone cylinder seals from Akaki-Trounalli, Cyprus.

Cory D. Crawford

- Figure 1: The Statue of Idrimi.
- Figure 2: Detail, Statue of Idrimi.

Karen Sonik

- Figure 1: Old Babylonian Period Baked Clay Plaque (ca. 2000–1600 BCE); Bull-Man holding a Gatepost.
- Figure 2: Old Babylonian Period Fired Clay Plaque (ca. 2000–1600 BCE); Nude Hero with Curls holding a Flowing Vase.
- Figure 3: Old Babylonian Period Fired Clay Plaque (ca. 2000–1600 BCE); Queen of the Night Plaque (Formerly the Burney Relief).
- Figure 4: Neo-Assyrian Period Stone Lamashtu Amulet (ca. 800–600 BCE) with image of Lamashtu on obverse and inscription on reverse.
- Figure 5: Neo-Assyrian Period Carnelian Seal (ca. late 8th century BCE); Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying the Monster Huwawa/Humbaba.
- Figure 6: Old Akkadian Period Black Serpentine Cylinder Seal (ca. 2300 BCE); Contest Scene: Three Groups of Combatants.
- Figure 7: Alabaster Relief Panel from the Temple of Ninurta at Nimrud (ca. 865 BCE); Ninurta and Azag (?) in Combat.
- Figure 8: Old Babylonian Period Fired Clay Plaque (ca. 1800–1600 BCE); Inscribed Huwawa Head with Modeled Entrails Delineating Features.

Jennifer C. Ross

- Figure 1: Chronological chart.
- Figure 2: W 9123,d. Lexical text belonging to the Uruk IV paleographic stage.
- Figure 3a: Sb 1944bis. Numerical tablet from Susa.
- Figure 3b: W 6883,a. Numerical tablet from Uruk.
- Figure 4a: Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. Prisoners.
- Figure 4b: Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. Animals.
- Figure 4c: Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. Vessels and an animal.
- Figure 5: Reconstructed seal impression from a bulla, from Uruk. Animals.
- Figure 6: W 6883,a, and other numerical tablets, reconstructed seal impression, from Uruk.
- Figure 7: Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. People, plants, and animals.

Melissa Eppihimer

- Figure 1: Detail of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin from his stele found at Susa. Akkadian period.
- Figure 2: Terracotta plaque with a scene of Gilgamesh and Enkidu killing Humbaba. Old Babylonian period.

Figure 3: Terracotta plaque with the “figure with mace.” Old Babylonian period.

Figure 4: The “Cruciform Monument” found at Sippar. Old Babylonian period or later.

Chikako E. Watanabe

Figure 1: The king’s lion hunt scenes from Room S¹, the North Palace, Nineveh (upper register).

Figure 2: The Battle of Til-Tuba: the sequence of the narratives.

Figure 3: Relief of Assurnasirpal II flanking the sacred tree and the winged disk, from Room B, the Northwest Palace, Nimrud.

Figure 4: Assurbanipal’s lion hunt scenes: plan of Room C of the North Palace in Nineveh.

Figure 5: The sword scene from the king’s lion hunt relief, from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh.

Figure 6: The lance scene from the king’s lion hunt relief, from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh.

Figure 7: The bow and arrow scene from the king’s lion hunt relief, from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh.

Figure 8: The preparation scene from the king’s lion hunt relief, from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh.

Figure 9: The presentation scene of Assurbanipal, from Room M, the North Palace, Nineveh.

Sarah B. Graff

Figure 1: Mold-made terracotta figurine from Diqdiqqah, Ur, Iraq.

Figure 2: Mold-made terracotta figurine, findspot unknown.

Amy Rebecca Gansell

Figure 1: Detail of the queen (probably Libbali-Sharrat) on the “Garden Party” relief. Nineveh, c. 645 BCE.

Figure 2: “Garden Party” relief portraying Assurbanipal dining in a garden with his queen (probably Libbali-Sharrat). Nineveh, c. 645 BCE.

Figure 3: Relief plaque portraying the queen/queen mother, Naqia. No provenience, 7th cen. BCE.

Figure 4: Stele portraying Assurbanipal’s queen, Liballi-Sharrat. Assur, c. 669–626 BCE.

Figure 5: Statue of a nude female figure, probably the goddess Ishtar. Nineveh, c. 1073–1056 BCE.

Figure 6: Line drawing detail of *in situ* cliff relief probably portraying a conflation of the goddesses Ishtar and Mulissu. Bavian, Iraq, c. 689 BCE.

Figure 7: Horse frontlet portraying a nude female figure holding a lotus. Nimrud, 9th–8th c. BCE.

Figure 8: Sculpture of a female face known as the “Mona Lisa of Nimrud.” Nimrud, 8th c. BCE.

Aubrey Baadsgaard

Figure 1: Map of early Mesopotamian city states.

Figure 2: Cylinder seal impression from the Royal Tombs of Ur (grave PG 800), showing seated females and female attendants or servers with drawn up hairstyles and wearing typical female robes.

Figure 3: Detail of the “war side” of the Royal Standard of Ur, showing dress of military personnel, including foot soldiers and chariot drivers.

Figure 4: Fragment of the battle scene from the Stele of the Vultures showing Eannatum of Lagash wearing a military cloak and sash and helmet depicting the high status or royal male hairstyle.

Figure 5: Cylinder seal impression from the Royal Tombs of Ur (grave PG 1237), showing a seated female on the upper register and female musicians on the lower register wearing drawn-up hairstyles and robes.

Figure 6: Reconstruction of Puabi’s headdress and body ornaments from grave PG 800 in the Royal Tombs of Ur.

- Figure 7: Photo of a male attendant at Ur (grave PG 789) wearing a helmet, a component of the typical “uniform” of soldiers or guards.
- Figure 8: Photo of a female attendant at Ur (grave PG 1237) wearing typical headdress of her “uniform,” including a gold ribbon, gold leaf pendant wreaths, gold flowers, a silver comb, large gold lunate earrings, and a gold and lapis lazuli choker and necklace.
- Figure 9: Gold helmet found in the tomb of Meskalamdug (PG 755) at Ur.
- Figure 10: Full inventory of dress worn by primary burial in Puabi’s grave (PG 800) in the Royal Cemetery of Ur.

Stephanie M. Langin-Hooper

- Figure 1: Figurine CBS 1952.
- Figure 2: Figurine CBS 2858.
- Figure 3: Figurine CBS 1954 (cast from original).
- Figure 4: Figurine M14884.
- Figure 5: Figurine B16934.
- Figure 6: Figurine M15544.

Mark B. Garrison

- Figure 1: Plan of Persepolis.
- Figure 2: Administrative zones in the Persepolis Fortification archive.
- Figure 3: Collated line drawing of PFS 93*.
- Figure 4: Impression of PFS 93* on PF 692 (reverse).
- Figure 5: Collated line drawing of PFS 51.
- Figure 6: Collated line drawing of PFS 9*.
- Figure 7: Collated line drawing of PFS 16*.
- Figure 8: Collated line drawing of PFS 38.
- Figure 9: Collated line drawing of PFS 2899*.
- Figure 10: Collated line drawing of PFS 857s.
- Figure 11: Collated line drawing of PFS 1567*.
- Figure 12: Collated line drawing of PFS 83*.
- Figure 13: Collated line drawing of PFS 11*.
- Figure 14: Collated line drawing of PFS 113*.
- Figure 15: Collated line drawing of PFS 71*.
- Figure 16: Collated line drawing of PFS 1568*.

Brian A. Brown

- Figure 1: Slab B-17a-b from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. Top register: Assyrian soldiers fire arrows at swimming enemies; bottom register: procession of captured enemies with “floating” tribute.
- Figure 2: Relief from the throneroom façade of the Northwest Palace showing tributaries with exotic gifts.
- Figure 3: A scene from the battle of Lachish (Southwest Palace, Room XXXVI, Slabs 8–9).
- Figure 4: Campaign in the marshes of southern Babylonia, shown on Slabs 2–4 from Room XXVIII, Southwest Palace.
- Figure 5: Slab 17 from Room M, North Palace of Assurbanipal, depicting a campaign in Egypt.
- Figure 6: Relief fragment from Room V¹/T¹, North Palace of Assurbanipal, showing Elamite captives eating food.
- Figure 7: Campaign against Arab people, Slabs 11–12 from Room L, North Palace.

Claudia E. Suter

- Figure 1: Projection of the relief carved on the Uruk Vase.
Figure 2: Impression of Late Uruk cylinder seal.
Figure 3: Obverse of the Figure aux Plumes plaque.

Tallay Ornan

- Figure 1: Akkadian seal impression on a clay tablet-envelope, depicting a lion subdued by two *lahmu* figures, unknown provenance.
Figure 2: Peg figurine of Gudea as a basket carrier from Telloh.
Figure 3: Rock relief of Iddin-Sin king of Simurrum.
Figure 4: Terracotta figurine of Gilgamesh trampling the head of Humbaba, Tell Asmar.
Figure 5: Drawing of a cylinder seal impression of Mukanišum, Mari.
Figure 6: Cultic pedestal of Tukulti-Ninurta I, king of Assyria, Assur.
Figure 7: Statue of Assurnasirpal II, king of Assyria, Nimrud.
Figure 8: Drawing of the side-relief of the “gate” monument, showing the god Aššur and the double image of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, Bavian-Khunis, northeast Assyria.

Anne Porter

- Figure 1: The find-spots of three objects of Naram-Sin.

Paul Collins

- Figure 1: Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) returns from a victorious campaign accompanied by a god in a winged disk. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, about 875–860 BCE.
Figure 2: An Assyrian fortified camp with tents and two priests standing beside an incense stand, table of offerings, and a chariot with divine standards. Southwest Palace, Nineveh, about 700–695 BCE.
Figure 3: Drawing made at the time of excavation of a relief from Room XXXVIII, Southwest Palace, Nineveh.
Figure 4: A victory parade includes a chariot with divine standards, soldiers playing catch with the severed heads of enemies, and figures dressed in lion skins. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, about 875–860 BCE.
Figure 5: An attack by the army of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) on the city of U[pa?]. Central Palace, Nimrud, about 730–727 BCE.
Figure 6: Teumman and his son fall from their chariot and flee into the woods during the battle of Til-Tuba. Southwest Palace, Nineveh, about 650 BCE.
Figure 7: The siege of a city and Assyrian soldiers carrying captured statues of gods. Central Palace, Nimrud, about 730–727 BCE.

Jean M. Evans

- Figure 1: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard.
Figure 2: Walter Andrae, 1919 reconstruction of Assur, Ishtar Temple G sanctuary.
Figure 3: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard, statue of a kneeling belted hero with clasped hands.
Figure 4: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard, statues of standing male and female figures holding cups.
Figure 5: Ur, Seal Impression Strata, drawing of the design from an Early Dynastic cylinder seal impressed on sealings.
Figure 6: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard, statue of a standing male figure with head and body carved separately.

Alice A. Petty

- Figure 1: Line drawing of the Stele of Ishtar, Ebla.
 Figure 2: The Stele of Ishtar, side A, Ebla.
 Figure 3: Stone basin from Temple D, front, Ebla.
 Figure 4: Stone basin from Temple D, side, Ebla.
 Figure 5: Carved wooden artifact, Ebla.
 Figure 6: Bull-legged offering table, Ebla.
 Figure 7: Stone basin from Temple B, front and side, Ebla.
 Figure 8: Stone basin from Temple B, front, Ebla.

David Kertai

- Figure 1: Floorplan of the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu.
 Figure 2: Floorplan of Sargon's Palace in Dur-Sharruken.
 Figure 3: Schematic plan of Sargon's Palace in Dur-Sharruken showing the different quadrants of the palace.
 Figure 4: Floorplan of Southwest Palace in Nineveh.

Ann Shafer

- Figure 1: Balawat Gates of Shalmaneser III, Band I.
 Figure 2: Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Court XIX.
 Figure 3: Khorsabad, Room 2.
 Figure 4: Khorsabad, Room 2.
 Figure 5: Khorsabad, Façade n.
 Figure 6: Balawat Gates of Assurnasirpal II, Band R5.
 Figure 7: Nineveh, North Palace Room S1.

Javier Álvarez-Mon

- Figure 1: Landsat photograph and map of southwest Iran.
 Figure 2a: Plan of the Fahliyān River plain and location of Kurangun.
 Figure 2b: Panoramic view of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh hill.
 Figure 2c: Panoramic view of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh hill.
 Figure 2d: Sketch of archaeological remains found in Kurangun.
 Figure 3a: View of Kurangun.
 Figure 3b: View of Kurangun.
 Figure 4a: Line-drawing of the Kurangun relief.
 Figure 4b: Line-drawing of the Kurangun relief.
 Figure 4c: Line-drawing of the Kurangun relief.
 Figure 5a: View of the worshippers in the staircases.
 Figure 5b: View of the central panel.
 Figure 6a: Line-drawings of the horizontal platform.
 Figure 6b: Line-drawings of the horizontal platform.
 Figure 6c–e: Photographs and line-drawings of seal impressions representing the Elamite god sitting on a coiled serpent.
 Figure 7a–b: Line-drawings of seals representing the god Enki/Ea in his Abzû domain:
 [a] Akkadian period seal from Ur; [b] Gudea is introduced by Ningišzida, Neo-Sumerian period.
 Figure 7c–e: Photographs of “Abzû” basins: [c] Early Dynastic Period from the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu; [d] Susa basin probably 12th century BCE; [e] From the temple of Assur in the city of Assur dated to the reign of Sennacherib.

Henry P. Colburn

Figure 1: Bisitun Relief of Darius I.

Figure 2: Line drawing of a relief from the tomb of Petosiris, Tuna el-Gebel, Egypt.

Figure 3a: Gordion seal 73.

Figure 3b: Line drawing of impressions of Gordion seal 73.

Figure 4: Statue of Darius from Susa.

Figure 5a–b: Line drawings of impressions of PFS 9* and 16*.

Figure 6: Carving styles in Volume One of *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*.

Figure 7: Statue of Ptahhotep.

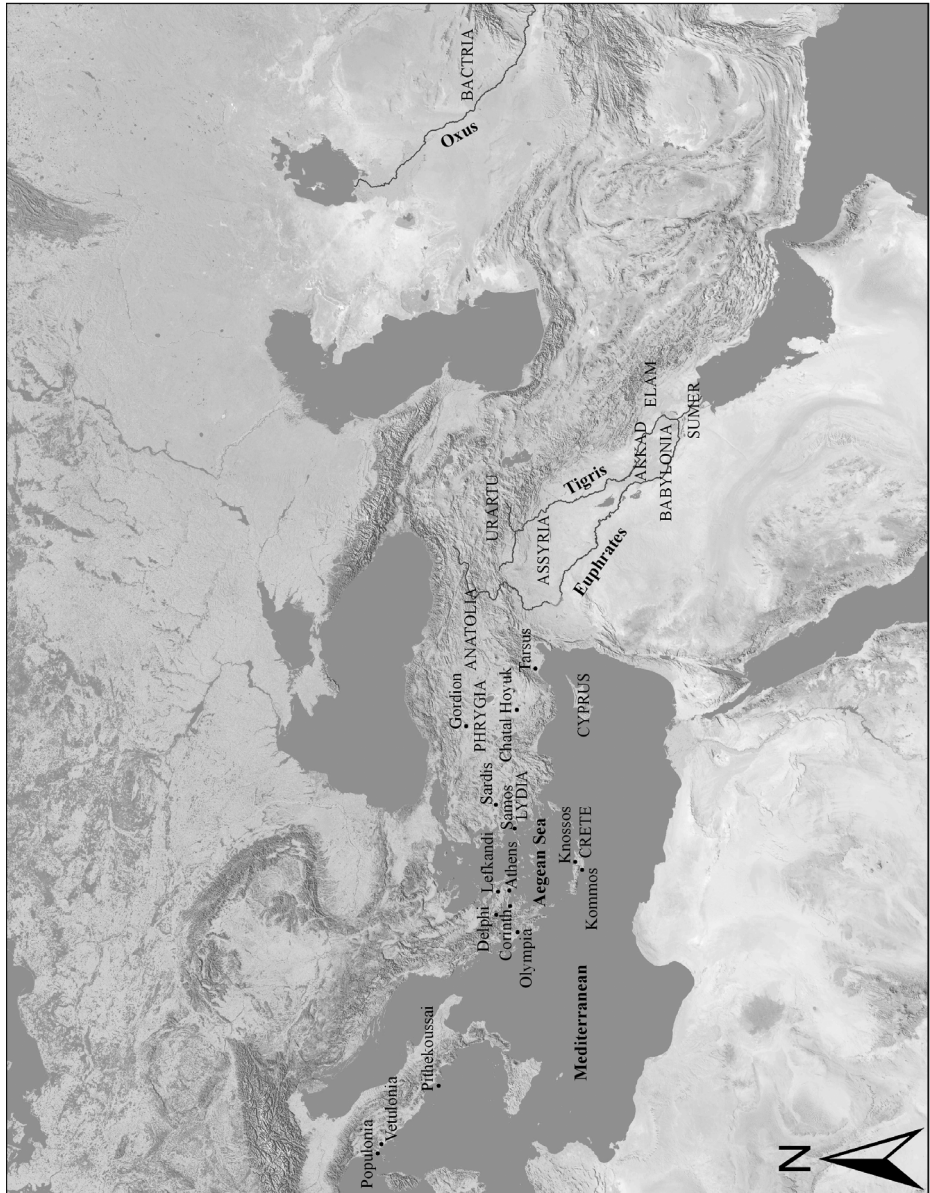
Figure 8: Gold bracelet from the Oxus Treasure.

Editors' Note

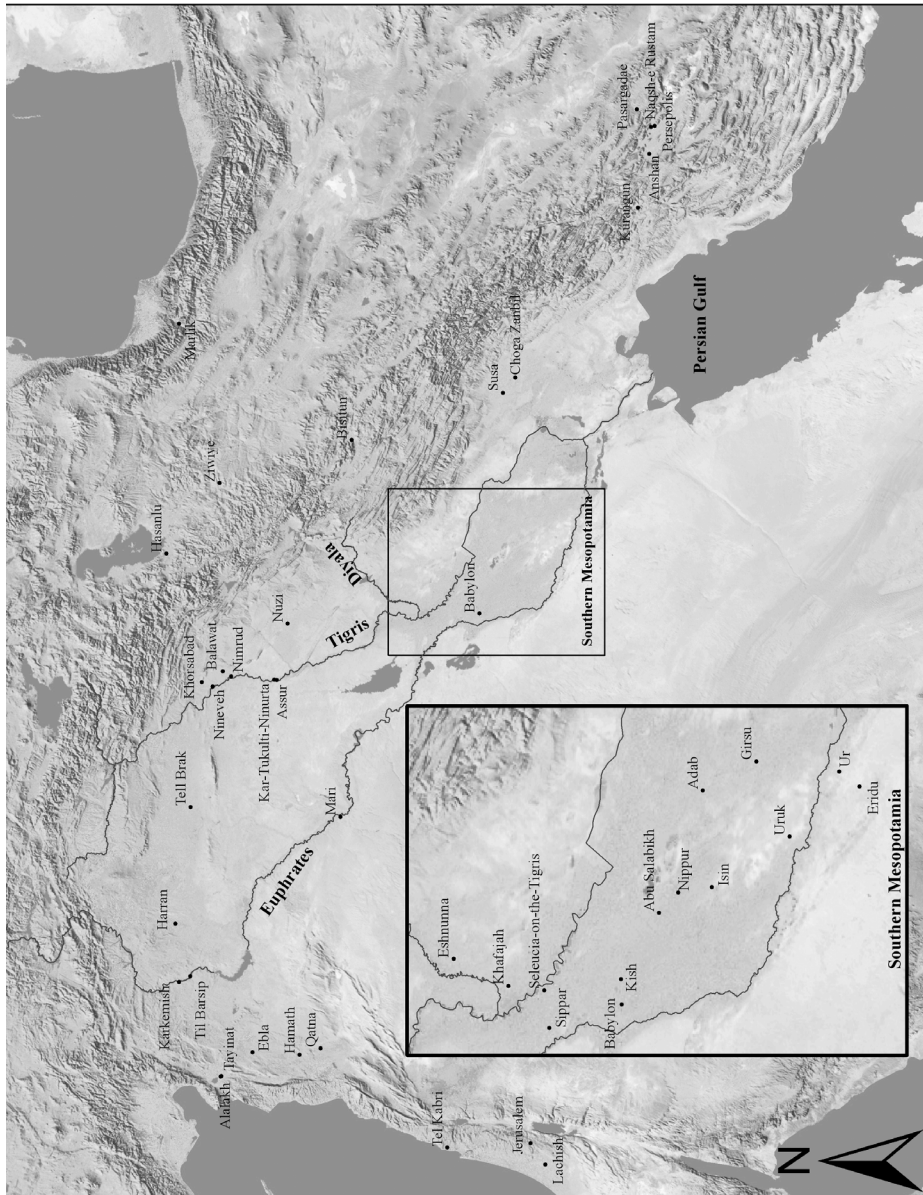
The editors chose not to impose particular rules of transliteration, spelling or dates, although contributors have been consistent within their papers. Akkadian and other ancient languages are rendered in italics, except Sumerian which is set in spaced letters.

Abbreviations of journals follow those used in the *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (CAD) and the *American Journal of Archaeology* (AJA). In addition, the following abbreviations are used:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| CANE | Sasson, Jack M., ed. 1995. <i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i> . New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. |
| ETCSL | Black, J. A., G. Cunningham, J. Ebeling, E. Flückiger-Hawker, E. Robson, J. Taylor, and G. Zólyomi. 1998–2006. <i>The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature</i> (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/). Oxford: University of Oxford. |
| RIMA 1 | Grayson, A. K. 1987. <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)</i> . Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. |
| RIMA 2 | Grayson, A. K. 1991. <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I: 1114–859 BC</i> . Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. |
| RIMA 3 | Grayson, A. K. 1996. <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II: 858–745 BC</i> . Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. |
| RIME 1 | Frayne, Douglas R. 2008. <i>Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)</i> . Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. |
| RIME 2 | Frayne, Douglas R. 1993. <i>Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2334–2113 BC)</i> . Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. |
| RIME 3/1 | Edzard, Dietz Otto. 1997. <i>Gudea and His Dynasty</i> . Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 3/1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. |
| RIME 4 | Frayne, Douglas R. 1990. <i>Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)</i> . The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. |
| RIA | Ebeling, Erich, Bruno Meissner, Dietz Otto Edzard, and Michael P. Streck, eds. 1928–. <i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Berlin: De Gruyter. |



Map 1: Map of the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean showing regions and sites mentioned. Map by Martin Weber; © Marian Feldman 2013.



Map 2: Detailed Map of the Ancient Near East showing sites mentioned. Map by Martin Weber;
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Marian H. Feldman

Introduction

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When De Gruyter approached me about editing a volume on Ancient Near Eastern art, the time seemed right for such a venture on at least two fronts. First was the notable absence of any current, large-scale compendium or textbook devoted solely to the art of the Ancient Near East, a particularly glaring gap given the numerous handbooks and companions on Ancient Near Eastern literature, archaeology and culture that have appeared in recent years.¹ Second was the groundswell of innovative thinking concerning Ancient Near Eastern art that I had encountered at conferences and in disparate publications, which assured me that there was a large pool of exciting scholars who could contribute to such a volume. The result is this collection of articles by a diverse group of scholars working on the visual, material and environmental arts of the Ancient Near East. The volume uses the term “critical” in its title in a twofold manner: critical in that the contributions employ the most current and innovative approaches in the field today, and critical in that the authors turn a close eye on both the material under study and the methods and approaches used now and previously. It does not strive to be comprehensive in surveying the periods and media of Ancient Near Eastern art, although its contents cover a wide temporal and geographical extent. Rather, authors were asked to write on topics that they felt were most pressing and of greatest interest at this moment, thus capturing a cross-section of the field of Ancient Near Eastern art history as it stands in the second decade of the twenty-first century. At the same time, the contributors anchor their approaches in the ancient evidence, providing rich historical contextualizations. Specific case studies range temporally from the fourth millennium BCE up to the Hellenistic period and geographically from Iran to the Mediterranean.

What is the Ancient Near East?

This is far from a straightforward question and has no single, absolute answer. Here, all three parts of the designation are capitalized – Ancient Near East – to indicate the

¹ The most recent publication that serves this purpose for the art is Dominique Collon’s general survey from 1995, which concentrates on the Ancient Near Eastern collections held by the British Museum.

constructed nature of the terminology;² it does not reflect any ancient understanding of a geographical realm, nor does it equate with commonly used contemporary designations, which tend to favor the terms “Middle East” or “Western Asia.” Geographical terminology is always freighted with biases and culturally contingent, and we acknowledge this in our use of the term “Ancient Near East,” which here includes areas stretching from Iran and Mesopotamia westward to the Levant, Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean.

The lack of correspondence with contemporary geographical units complicates the problem of where to draw the boundaries around the “Ancient Near East.” As editors, we did not explicitly state any one set of boundaries, nor did we impose any geographical expectations on the authors, who ranged geographically as they saw fit. Nonetheless, through the selection of authors and topics, *de facto* certain geographical foci have been targeted while others receive less attention; most obviously this is the case with Egypt, which makes only occasional appearances in the course of the contributions. We made the decision to set aside Egypt, not out of any ideological or pedagogical reasoning, but rather for the sake of manageability in terms of scale of the project; Egypt strikes us as worthy of an entire volume on its own.

Not only are the geographical boundaries elusive, so too are the chronological ones. How far back in time might we extend our discussions of visual culture? The earliest topics of this volume lie in the fourth millennium BCE, generally considered to be the formative period of urbanization in southern Mesopotamia. However, contributions might well have stretched back further in time, considering the recent discoveries of carved stone reliefs at the tenth-millennium BCE site of Göbekli Tepe in eastern Turkey, or the late Neolithic and Chalcolithic period remains at numerous sites around the Ancient Near East (Çatal Höyük, Ain Ghazal, Susa, etc.).³ The absence of these earlier periods in this volume is primarily a product of current institutional and disciplinary divides that tend to separate the pre-literate societies from those of the “historical” periods, with scholars working in the earlier periods being placed more in anthropology departments and “natural history” museums than in area studies departments or “fine art” museums.

The cut-off for the latest date of case studies must likewise be acknowledged to be arbitrary. Only one article crosses the traditional end-date of the “ancient” part of the Ancient Near East – the conquests of Alexander the Great between 333 and 330 BCE: Stephanie Langin-Hooper’s discussion of Hellenistic figurines from Babylonia. This, too, is more a reflection of institutional, rather than real, divides, with the Hellenistic period generally falling within the purview of Classics departments, and the later

² However, individual authors chose their own geographical terminology; none were imposed by the editors.

³ See, for example, Schmidt 2010, 2011; Hodder 2010; Hansen 2006.

Iranian states – Parthian and Sassanian – occupying an uneasy no-man’s land between the “ancient” and the “Islamic” Near East.

It is not possible in this introduction to provide even a general outline of the historical developments for all the places and times covered by the articles.⁴ However, the reader will find that the individual authors have provided such background and historical contextualization as is relevant for their specific topics, which, in the end, cover much of what might be called the Ancient Near East.

Ancient Near Eastern Art History

Can we speak of a discipline of “Ancient Near Eastern Art History”? The contributions in this volume provide an answer in the affirmative to this question and sketch the outlines of such a discipline. While the number of scholars devoted to its study may be small in comparison with other fields such as Classical Greece, and while within the scholarship of the Ancient Near East, the study of texts and archaeology is predominant, the numerous articles gathered here demonstrate the vitality of the art historical study of the Ancient Near East. Many of them directly engage with what can be understood as the discipline of Ancient Near Eastern Art History through critical examination of prior work – building upon, enriching, and often challenging earlier interpretations. In the very process, these articles also contribute to the ongoing construction of the discipline today and point to its future directions.

At the same time, the volume reveals the impossibility of describing any one, monolithic disciplinary approach that might be referred to as “art historical,” and hence our reference to multiple “approaches” in the book’s title. In the diversity of materials studied, questions asked, and approaches and methods applied, it is evident that there is no one way to conduct an art historical study of the Ancient Near East. It cannot be reduced to only the identification of subject matter (iconography) or the attribution to place or time (connoisseurship), though these remain important elements of study. The discipline is, moreover, closely allied to archaeology and anthropology. This alliance is forged not just through the general trend toward contextual concerns that favor provenanced artworks, which by definition have an archaeological component to their study, but also through the application of anthropological theories of material culture.

A primary concern of the volume is to provide specific case studies by which new theories and approaches can be applied to the ancient evidence. To this end, most of the contributions take not only an intellectual problem, such as the relationship between text and image or the juncture of the royal with the divine, but also a defined body of evidence – visual, material, architectural, environmental, and/or textual – through which to tease out the problem.

⁴ For an excellent general overview of the history of the Ancient Near East, see Van De Mieroop 2007.

We begin the volume with a section, “Defining the Field,” that provides different perspectives on the development of the Ancient Near Eastern art historical endeavor as a whole. Lamia al-Gailani Werr contributes her personal experiences and conversations with friends and colleagues to sketch the historical trajectory of Iraqi archaeology from the early twentieth century up to today. Turning to the issue of fakes and their impact on scholarship, Oscar Muscarella cautions us against the creation of a “false history” derived from forged objects, such as for Media in pre-Achaemenid times.

Next, Constance von Rüden and Ann Gunter examine the Near East’s relationship to the “West.” Von Rüden, with regard to the appearance of frescoes in the Levant during the second millennium BCE at sites such as Qatna, Alalakh and Tel Kabri, argues against an East-West classification dichotomy. Her historiographic investigation reveals how old assumptions and interests continue to shape and constrain current scholarship. Gunter picks up the thread of this argument for the first millennium BCE, critically evaluating how scholarship has approached the question of Orientalism and Orientalization. Like von Rüden, she warns against lumping everything together into an ahistorical “Orient”/“East” that denies cultural, period, or regional diversity. In proposing a closer, renewed look at Assyrian influence on Greece and Italy, Gunter suggests moving beyond motifs and style to technologies and object genres, such as decorated bronze vessels and horse trappings, carved ivory furniture and containers, or faience amulets and figurines.

Following Gunter’s call, the next section considers technologies and practices of artistic production. The section opens with Silvana Di Paolo’s consideration of the fundamental concept of “workshops” in the Ancient Near East, in which she raises the core question of the relationship between specialized crafters and structures of power. Due to the general lack of documentary and archaeological evidence for Ancient Near Eastern workshops, art historical approaches such as connoisseurship, formalism, and iconography have been employed to determine workshop locations. However, Di Paolo notes that new questions posed by scholars today, particularly influenced by semiotics, mark a shift away from a concern with origins to consider fluid forms of meaning and significance.

Allison Karmel Thomason’s article focuses specifically on the terminological choices made by scholars in their classification of art genres and how these choices are accompanied by baggage that conditions the kinds of questions we ask. Starting with a historiographical overview of the term “minor arts” and its relationship to “fine arts” and “crafts,” Thomason surveys the treatment of the so-called minor arts in standard, English-language textbooks of Ancient Near Eastern art. Like Di Paolo, Thomason traces the evolving treatment of the issue in the field, noting a recent “material culture turn” that focuses on questions of agency and identity.

The following three articles in this section take specific case studies through which to explore questions of technology and artistic practice. Francesca Onnis considers how the material properties of an artwork’s shape, medium and use affects the decorative schemes employed on it in the specific case of “Phoenician” metal bowls

from the early Iron Age. Yelena Rakic and Joanna Smith ask similar questions of cylinder seals, the Near Eastern art/administrative object *par excellence*. Rakic argues that changes in sealing practices during the Akkadian period drove stylistic changes in the popular motif of the contest. In particular, she points to innovations of standardization in the operation of the administrative apparatus of the state. Smith applies a biographical approach, in addition to practice theory and aspects of materiality, to seals and seal carving in Late Bronze and Iron Age Cyprus. Analyzing the palimpsest of recarved seals characteristic of Cypriot production, in combination with close stratigraphic study of archaeological findspots, she considers changes through time in the reception and use of certain themes in Cypriot art.

With the so-called Linguistic or Semiotic Turn in humanistic scholarship of the 1970s and 80s, questions of the relationship between text and image came to the fore in Ancient Near Eastern art historical studies. It seems, therefore, particularly relevant to assess the current state of the question, forty years on, and thus the third section of the volume is devoted to the theme of “Text and Image.” Cory Crawford begins with a critical review of the theme, arguing that text and image operate in Mesopotamia in ways that may not align with our expectations because neither text nor image needed to “encode propositions” about the “real” world. After reviewing the general privileging of word over image, which Crawford traces from biblical discourse through Protestant reforms and early modern aesthetics, the article then explores the intersecting, overlapping and collapsing boundaries between text and image in Mesopotamia through a case study of the statue of Idrimi from Alalakh.

Karen Sonik takes the specific situation of mythological texts and their relationship to images as her topic of analysis. She first examines the terminology that we use to define concepts of art and artists, as well as the parameters of what constitutes “mythology” in Mesopotamia. Like Thomason, she challenges the distinction between “fine arts” and “crafts,” and considers issues of distributed agency and collaborative production. Sonik suggests that the divergence between the extant textual versions of myths and visual images of seemingly mythological motifs may be due to differences in how texts and images were produced and disseminated: mythological texts being restricted to the scholarly realm of the advanced literate, while art was produced along “universalized” lines of pattern books and repeated traditions that were circulated in iconic rather than narrative form.

The next three articles continue to explore questions of text and image through specific case studies. Jennifer Ross analyses the relationship between seals and writing during the formative Late Uruk period, starting with the premise that both acted as technologies of communication that affirmed identities and verified transactions. Drawing on the practice theory of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, which interrelate people, agency and structure, she proposes that the categorizing and ranking of seal motifs resulted in the development of the quintessentially Mesopotamian text genre that we refer to as lexical lists.

Melissa Eppihimer takes the question of later representations of Akkadian period rulers as the starting point for an examination of how Mesopotamians remembered and constructed the past through images and texts, what she calls their “historical consciousness.” For Eppihimer, the divergent legacies of the Akkadian kings as remembered in the textual versus the visual traditions derive from the fundamentally different nature of images and text in Mesopotamia. Similarly, Chikako Watanabe argues that styles of pictorial narratives reveal visual thought processes that are not explicitly stated in texts, but that belonged to shared, “normative” traditions. She identifies an unusual narrative arrangement in Assurbanipal’s famous lion hunts in Room C of the North Palace at Nineveh – a compositional arrangement that she calls “centric.” The hallmark of this narrative composition is a symmetrical arrangement around a central axis, which is most commonly applied to non-narrative representations. Its unusual application to narrative imagery during Assurbanipal’s reign permits the conceptual association of separate incidents through their visual symmetry – what Watanabe calls a “manipulated visual framework” – that enabled a new perspective of historical events.

The next section consisting of six articles explores different facets of Ancient Near Eastern social identities. Several of them focus on the human body and clothing as especially charged sites of personhood and identity. Sarah Graff studies Mesopotamian mold-made terracotta plaques of females dating from the late third to early second millennium BCE. Rather than search for any single identification of these female figures, for example as a particular goddess, Graff considers them within concepts of gender, sexuality and reproduction. Drawing on literary and mythological texts, she illuminates conceptions of sexuality and the role of clay in Mesopotamian creative and reproductive acts. Amy Gansell synthesizes an overview of ideal feminine beauty during the Neo-Assyrian period through an analysis of artistic representations, artifacts like jewelry, literary references and ethnographic comparisons. Examining the representational arts and artistic artifacts within the larger cultural horizon of the Assyrian Empire, Gansell accesses ancient attitudes and conceptions of beauty.

Aubrey Baadsgaard takes a critical look at fashion trends in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia. Drawing upon theoretical perspectives of embodiment and materiality, she considers the role of fashion, clothing and body modification in forging social relations during a formative period in Ancient Near Eastern history when the political complexity of the city-state emerged. Shifting to the other end of the temporal spectrum, Stephanie Langin-Hooper examines the complex intermingling that happened “on the ground” during the Hellenistic period in Babylonia. Taking terracotta figurines as a starting point, she provides a fresh look at the so-called Herakles figure in relation to developing notions of masculinity through an analysis of multiple “inter-object entanglements.” From this, she concludes that hybrid qualities speak to both Greek and Babylonian cultural traditions and point to their purposeful selection by the ancient users and producers.

Mark Garrison's article demonstrates how seals and their impressions on archival documents provide an ideal vehicle for exploring the socio-political dynamics of visual imagery. With a detailed study of sealings found on tablets from the Achaemenid period Persepolis Fortification archive, Garrison reconstructs a system of administrative interactions and identities that allow him to delineate differing levels of the administrative hierarchy. Brian Brown analyzes representations of ethnicity in late Assyrian art, identifying an increasing emphasis on "ethnic" features in the depictions of foreigners over the course of the ninth through seventh centuries BCE. His study relates the use of ethnic markers to demographic changes in the empire. Noting that the rendering of ethnic difference is not bound by any mimetic need to reproduce "reality," Brown proposes that the increasing interest in depicting such markers derives from the Assyrian state's own growing sense of threatened identity and a need to more clearly define "us" versus "them."

As a subset of social identities, the relationship between religion, ritual and politics forms the thematic core of the next section of five articles. The first three articles in this section, in different ways, each address the question of royal deification. Claudia Suter tackles the difficult problem of identifying figures in early Mesopotamian art, particularly differentiating between human and divine figures during the Late Uruk period. Drawing on aspects of philosophy, cognitive science, and visual studies, Suter stresses the need to interpret Mesopotamian imagery in the context of the object on which it appears and the larger network of images and monuments within which it would have circulated. To this end, she performs a close reading of the Uruk (Warka) Vase, arguing against the traditional interpretation of a sacred marriage and instead linking the image to royal power and ideology associated with grain storage and new fiber technologies. Tallay Ornan also investigates the close relationship between royalty and the divine through a consideration of the divergent ways texts and images link kings to gods. Providing an overview from the third millennium through the Assyrian Empire, Ornan proposes that texts make a more explicit association between kings and gods, even to the point of deification, while images rely more on indirect means to bring the king closer to the divine realm. Anne Porter's article on the charismatic Akkadian ruler, Naram-Sin, finds inspiration in anthropological studies of Melanesian conceptions of partible personhood to consider how images of Naram-Sin could actively distribute his presence around the empire. She challenges Naram-Sin's long-accepted status as self-deified and reassesses critical monuments from his reign, including his victory stele and the Bassetki bronze, to reinterpret his relationship to the divine world.

The last two articles in the section investigate more broadly the relationship between the divine world and politics. Paul Collins examines the complex intersection between texts and images during the Neo-Assyrian period, which combine ideas of power and authority with those relating to the natural and supernatural worlds. He argues that mythological and heroic aspects of kingship lie at the heart of Assyrian representations of warfare. The final article in this section by Jean Evans approaches

Early Dynastic “votive” sculptures through an audience response perspective and proposes that style – in this particular case, “abstraction” – serves specific affective roles (and by implication was purposely selected for by the producers) rather than being the material expression of an inevitable artistic developmental scheme. Evans considers the abstract Early Dynastic sculptures within their ritualistic contexts and suggests that they mark a turning point in the way such temple sculptures functioned, from cultic paraphernalia to embodiments of (potentially multiple) donors.

Space, as the relational glue holding together individual objects, monuments, and buildings, has become a topic of increasing interest in studies of visual and material culture. The final section of the volume is dedicated to explorations relating to spatial signification on a variety of scales. Alice Petty explores three carved stone monuments from Middle Bronze Age Ebla to consider how they structured sacred space through their visual narratives. Relying on close formal analysis of the imagery in conjunction with their spatial presence within cultic architecture, she examines how image, placement, scale, and form engage the viewer and elicit ritual performances.

Shifting the focus from cultic space to palatial space, David Kertai provides a reexamination of the Assyrian palace, revising Geoffrey Turner’s generally accepted typology of palace suites. Kertai argues for neither strictly formalist/morphological criteria nor for purely functional criteria in constructing a building typology, but for a flexible combination of the two. In his overview of the changes and continuities in palace building over the course of the Neo-Assyrian period, Kertai raises questions of circulation and challenges the dichotomy between public and private spaces.

The next two articles look at spatial concerns across a larger scale – the “landscape.” Ann Shafer considers the representation of landscape in Neo-Assyrian arts as a subject matter in and of itself and not just as a setting for a narrative, treating visual landscapes and the journeys that they depict as embodied elements of ritual activity. According to Shafer, both the depiction of landscapes and the reality that they point to served as cosmically charged motivations for the Assyrian kings to explore and exploit the greater world around them. This motivation catalyzed the actual journeying through the landscape, accompanied by ritual activities, that involved the human body in experiences of the world on a phenomenological level, which in turn contributed to the acquisition of specialized, esoteric knowledge of distant places controlled by the king. Javier Álvarez-Mon analyzes the aesthetics of the natural environment – how landscape and topography generate an aesthetic affect – through a case study of the Elamite rock-cut sanctuary at Kurangun in southwestern Iran. For Álvarez-Mon, agency can be seen in the natural landscape such that topographic features, and their (re)shaping by human activity, generate affective qualities that engaged human senses and connected to the numinous.

Expanding the spatial scale yet again, to the farthest extents of the Achaemenid Empire, Henry Colburn differentiates between two facets of Achaemenid art: official imperial art (*art of the empire*) and art produced in the local areas of the empire (*art in the empire*). Looking at three specific case studies – Darius’ Egyptian statue found at

Susa, two seals of the high official Parnakka, and a statue of an Egyptian official Ptahhotep – Colburn shows how these two modes of production were always in dialogue with one another, as well as with older artistic traditions.

Historiographic and Theoretical Contributions of the Volume

In addition to assembling a rich collection of Near Eastern case studies, the volume's articles contain critical historiographic reviews at the level of Ancient Near Eastern art history, Ancient Near Eastern studies as a whole, and more generally the discipline of art history. Several articles closely examine the frameworks – philosophical, political, and economic – that provide the field with its intellectual structure(s). Muscarella, in reviewing the situation of collecting, displaying, and studying objects without archaeological provenances, shows how we today construct ancient cultures; when we include items that are not truly ancient, we create a false picture of the past. Similarly, al-Gailani Werr's reminiscences of the practice of archaeology in the state of Iraq highlight the role that external factors, particularly politics, have on the reconstruction of past historical times.

The Ancient Near East's institutional and methodological relationship with Biblical and Classical studies assumes a central position in discussions regarding the development of the field, seen for example in the articles by Crawford, von Rüdén, Gunter, Langin-Hooper, and Colburn. Classical and Western philosophy informs the background of articles that touch upon notions of aesthetics, such as those of Di Paolo, Thomason, Onnis, Suter and Álvarez-Mon. Álvarez-Mon, for example, discusses Kantian aesthetics and critiques its usefulness for Ancient Near Eastern art, arguing instead for a “pre-Kantian religiously-informed notion of aesthetics.” In order to avoid a dependency on modern, Western notions of beauty, Gansell argues for a culturally contextualized study of images and adornments of women from the Assyrian period.

Questions and problems of terminology – definitions and the assumptions and constraints that they bring to interpretations – receive sustained treatment in many of the contributions. As just a few examples, Thomason explores the different connotations that are often unacknowledged in the use of terms such as “minor” and “fine” arts; Sonik likewise interrogates our definitions of art and artists. Brown provides a succinct discussion of ethnicity and its often vague usage in Ancient Near Eastern studies. Álvarez-Mon provides an overview of recent scholarship on landscape and the environment, while Shafer defines “landscape” within a Neo-Assyrian conceptualization, noting that its definition is culturally contingent.

Scholarly reception is also addressed by several of the authors, including that of Cypriot antiquities in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the common

era by Smith, as well as the treatment of Hellenistic period figurines from Babylonia by Langin-Hooper and of “minor” arts such as cylinder seals by Thomason. Evans reviews early twentieth-century CE viewing habits and expectations that colored scholarly interpretations of Early Dynastic temple sculpture. Eppihimer, in line with current interests in memory studies, projects the question of reception back into the past, investigating how later Mesopotamians viewed the Akkadian past.

Influential theories and interpretations, derived mainly from scholarship on areas outside the Ancient Near East, are scrutinized by many of the authors, who present critical reviews of theories and methods employed more generally in the disciplines of art history, anthropology, and archaeology. Di Paolo provides overviews of anthropological and art historical approaches to the study of craft production from V. Gordon Childe and Cathy Costin to Giovanni Morelli, Heinrich Wölfflin and Erwin Panofsky. In considering depictions of females on terracotta plaques, Sarah Graff reviews the impact of general anthropological theories of a universal Mother Goddess on the interpretations of the Near Eastern material.

Prominent among the theoretical approaches employed by the authors are social history (for example, Garrison, Langin-Hooper, Collins, Kertai, Colburn), cognitive and phenomenological approaches (for example, Gansell, Porter, Suter, Petty, Shafer, Alvarez-Mon), and practice theory (for example, Ross, Rakic, Smith, Baadsgaard). Social history drives contextual approaches by which objects and artifacts are examined within larger assemblages of socially associated elements instead of being studied solely through typology and classification of similar objects. The cognitive and phenomenological approaches, espoused by archaeologists such as Colin Renfrew and Julian Thomas, posit a materiality to and embodiment of human ideas and thought, in which humans as social creatures engage with the physical world around them on an experiential level. Practice theory, rooted in the writings of Bourdieu and Giddens, has close relations with cognitive and phenomenological approaches and highlights the ways in which the larger social environment (what Bourdieu calls *habitus*) shapes and constrains individual and group activity. For art historical and archaeological topics, both phenomenology and practice theory find voice in material culture studies and anthropological theories of materiality. Of course, many of the papers draw upon multiple approaches and theories, deftly intertwining their insights in order to generate new interpretations, and those mentioned above by no means constitute the full array. The various papers engaged with these theories and approaches all provide richly nuanced discussions as well as lengthy bibliographies for the reader to access.

The inclusion early on in the volume of a section on text and image points to the important role that linguistic studies and literary criticism have played in the art historical study of the Ancient Near East, a culture wealthy in textual sources of many genres. Both Sonik and Suter, in their use of the notion of polysemy derived from the work of literary critics such as Roland Barthes, underscore the success of semiotic

approaches in the field.⁵ Sonik and Watanabe's articles demonstrate the continuing relevance of art historical studies of visual narrative by earlier scholars such as Franz Wickhoff on Roman art and Kurt Weitzmann on illustrated manuscripts. Crawford, in his detailed historiography of the study of text and image in the Ancient Near East, provides a critical review of the literary approaches, including Saussurian semiotics, bringing the discussion up to Thomason's Material Culture Turn of recent years, which integrates Peircian semiotics with phenomenological approaches and theories of materiality. With the Material Culture Turn has come an interest in exploring the affective, even agentive, properties of visual and material products as exemplified in the work of Alfred Gell and other anthropologists of art. This interest is explicitly pursued in the articles of Crawford, Sonik, Eppihimer, Porter, and Evans, but implicitly underlies many of the other articles as well, including those taking space as affective (Petty, Shafer, Álvarez-Mon).

As a sum total, this volume serves to rectify the often secondary role that artistic production has played in relation to texts in the Ancient Near East. The richness, depth and breath of the contributions showcase the current vitality of the art historical study of the Ancient Near East.

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⁵ See, also, Di Paolo in this volume.

I. Defining the Field

Lamia al-Gailani Werr

Archaeology and Politics in Iraq¹

Abstract: Governments have always tried to use archaeology for their agendas and as tools of propaganda. As a new country in the twentieth century, Iraq – its people and government – was searching for a unified identity; ancient Iraq has been a good vehicle for this purpose. This paper discusses the contribution of the Antiquities Department and the Iraq Museum in forming and exposing Iraq's history by excavations and exhibitions for the public.

Keywords: Iraqi Antiquities Department, Iraq Museum, Iraqi artists, archaeology, propaganda

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An impressive looking booklet was published by Iraq's Ministry of Information and Culture in the 1980s under the title *"From Nebuchadnezzar to Saddam Hussein, Babylon Rises again."* The title betrays what the contents would be. The pamphlet initially gives the history of the city and its famous kings, their conquests and building achievements. However, the purpose of this propaganda piece is to justify why Saddam is rebuilding Babylon. On page 6 of the booklet it says in English: *"Saddam Hussein, the grandson of the Babylonians,"* and on page 27: *"President Saddam Hussein was acting in his capacity as heir to this great civilization, and descendant of those Arab dynasties....."* His direct role in the rebuilding of the city is defined in another paragraph on page 26: *"Indeed the president's role went beyond giving directions, to outlining the goals to be achieved such as his orders to restore Babylon, its mountains, lakes, tourist facilities, restaurants and roads etc...."*² The consequence of this was unfortunate as many of the reconstruction work lacked

¹ The subject of archaeology and politics in Iraq during the first half of the twentieth century has been discussed in a number of publications, among them Lloyd 1947; Larsen 1996; Bernhardson 2005; Fales 2006; Goode 2010. Little has been written on the role of the Antiquities Department and the Iraq Museum in raising awareness about Iraq's ancient history, and how the successive governments dealt with this new discipline. Because of the lack of literature, I have relied more on my own recollection and conversations with friends and colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Salim al-Alousi and Dr. Muayad Dimerji for the valuable information they have given me.

² "Mountains" is an error in translation in the pamphlet – "mound" is the correct word. These are new mounds constructed to hold cable cars for tourists to have a birdseye view of the city. The word *lakes* is also an error in translation – it should be ponds. One of the mounds was named Saddam, the second Nissan, after the month when the Baath Party was established. Only one was named after the god Tammuz in recognition that these structures are in Babylon.

archaeological experts.³ The restoration of the palaces was in fact more rebuilding with free interpretation, in order to make them more impressive; for example, the walls were constructed to a higher level than the originals. The Hellenistic theatre became much larger and a special box for the President was added. Bricks were stamped with Saddam's name as the new builder of Babylon. This was in line with the notion that he was following in the steps of the earlier rulers of Babylon. Iraqis flocked to see it and reveled in their history as interpreted and appropriated by Saddam Hussein. All these activities, however impressive to the ordinary citizens, had an adverse effect to the ancient city; UNESCO declined to award it a World Heritage Site title.

Babylon was first excavated at the beginning of the 20th century by German archaeologists, ending with the outbreak of World War I. Most of the archaeological finds were taken to Berlin, including the remarkable Ishtar gate. Restoration and excavations were resumed in Babylon by the Iraq Antiquities Department in 1957, and in 1959 a small replica of the Ishtar Gate was built outside the main palace area. Work continued annually, but on a small scale due to fund restrictions. It was due to Saddam's interest in resurrecting the ancient city that work took a speedy and grander turn: the palaces and temples of Nebuchadnezzar, particularly those along the wide Procession Street, were completely reconstructed (Fig. 1). The Procession Street was used by the Babylonians during the New Year festival, when a procession carrying visiting gods from other cities took place.⁴

It is probably safe to say that Iraqis were not aware of their ancient history at the onset of the twentieth century. Their identity was with the Prophet Mohammed and the rise of Islam. History before Islam was *Jahiliyah* (pre-Islam age of ignorance). However, not all Iraqis were ignorant of the European archaeologists' discoveries of ancient Mesopotamia. Gertrude Bell mentions discussing the Old Babylonian ruler Hammurabi with the Naqib of Baghdad in 1909 (Bell 2008: 195). And the Antiquities Department and the Iraq Museum were important factors in building Iraq's identity as we know it today. The new discoveries in the 1920s and 30s of the Sumerians, Babylonians and the Assyrians became readily available to the Iraqis. A more important factor in the development of Iraq's identity was the employment of young artists, painters and sculptors from the Institute of Fine Arts to work as conservators in the

³ When the Director General of Antiquities voiced his objection to the digging of the ponds because of the danger of seeping water to the archaeological levels below, his membership in the Babylon Committee was terminated (personal communication with Dr. Muayad Dimerji).

⁴ By the 1980s, the people of the modern city of Hilla would come and celebrate their weddings by the replica Ishtar gate; the bride and groom would stand while the guests' dancing and singing were accompanied by a band. Unfortunately this custom came to abrupt end in 2003 when the American army pitched their camp in the city. It is a great pity that the international outcry has concentrated on the damage that befell the archaeological ruins while ignoring the loss of the local tradition, because the city has been closed to the public for the last ten years.



Figure 1: Procession Street, Babylon. Author's photograph.

newly established laboratory that served both the Antiquities Department and the Museum, a tradition that still continues today.

These young artists were the core of the burgeoning artistic movement in Iraq that flourished in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. A few of them had recently returned from scholarships in Europe. They were full of ideas of what they had learned and were ready to work as conservators and to study the remarkable antiquities of their own country. In addition, the officials in the Antiquities Department became patron of the arts. They played an important role in commissioning works of art from these artists beginning with the Director Sati' al-Husri and the directors after him. Khalid al-Rahal made the head of a Sumerian queen that was exhibited in the Iraq Museum. He dressed her with the jewelry from the Royal cemetery of Ur.⁵ It became an iconic figure representing the Sumerians in Iraq. She is known to Iraqis as Queen Shuba'd and she is still frequently illustrated on postcards and souvenirs (Fig. 2). Hafidh al-Droubi painted two large panels. One depicted life in Hatra, the Hellenistic city in north-eastern Iraq that was excavated by the Iraqis in the 1950s. The second panel illustrated life in Babylon. Both panels were displayed in the exhibition halls of the old Iraq Museum.

During the coronation of King Faisal II in 1952, Jawad Salim was commissioned to replicate an Assyrian chariot, which was paraded in the streets of Baghdad during the

⁵ For the Royal Cemetery, see, Zettler and Horne 1998.



Figure 2: Letters and envelopes souvenir folder depicting the Lyre of Ur and Khalid al-Rahal's rendering of the head of Shuba'ad, a Sumerian queen. Author's photograph.

festivities. Abdulrahman al-Gailani made a replica of the Lyre of Ur; the original head of the bull was made of pure gold and so was that of the replica.⁶ The Ur Lyre became another icon of Iraq and the Sumerians and also appears today on posters and souvenirs (Fig. 2).

An illustration of the influence of the Iraq Museum and the Antiquities Department is best portrayed by one of Iraq's foremost painters today, Dia Azzawi, who has a degree in archaeology from the University of Baghdad. He was employed by the Antiquities Department and was assigned to the laboratory as an artist rather than as an archaeologist in the Iraq Museum. Many of his paintings betray the strong influence

⁶ This replica head has its own story. After the Gulf War, it was exhibited in the Iraq Museum, while the original was stored in the Central Bank. It was this replica that was looted in 2003.

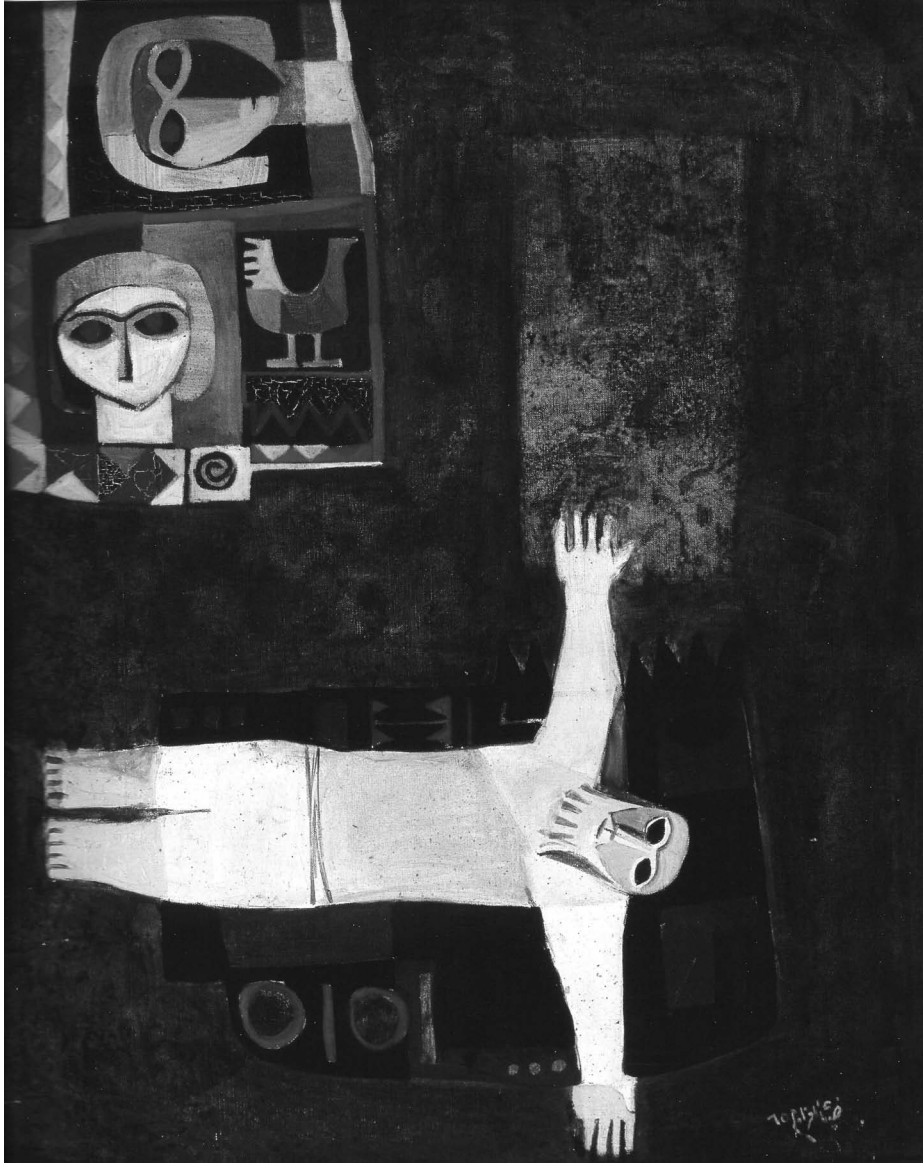


Figure 3: *Ishtar My Love*. Pocock 2009: 65.

of Iraq's ancient history. In his painting *Ishtar My Love*, the faces of the figures show the influence of Sumerian statues, and in fact this manner of rendering faces has become one of Azzawi's most distinctive characteristics (Fig. 3).

One publication that popularized Iraq's ancient myths was Taha Baqir's translation into Arabic of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, published by the Ministry of Culture in the

early 1960s. It became a best seller. As a rule the Ministry did not reprint its publications; however, because of popular demand, Taha Baqir's translation was frequently reprinted. The contribution of Iraqi pioneer artists, painters and sculptors who were inspired by the new discoveries of ancient Iraq, together with the translation of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, is unfortunately ignored by critics and historians.

Saddam like most Iraqis was aware of these new discoveries. He dreamt of following in the steps of those great leaders, which led to his interest in the artists because he knew they could help in immortalizing him. His two favorite historical figures were Nebuchadnezzar and Saladin. Both were conquerors of Jerusalem, and that was one of his propaganda policies of liberating Palestine. He was portrayed on posters with one or both of these historical figures. The phrase, "from Nebuchadnezzar to Saddam Hussein," was used on posters, on medallions and on a number of other objects. On one poster Saddam is shown building a wall in Babylon while Nebuchadnezzar is carrying a basket helping him. The Arabic text exclaims: from Saddam Hussein to Nebuchadnezzar (Fig. 4). On another poster Saddam is portrayed as Nebuchadnezzar wearing a Babylonian garment while holding a bow and arrow, aiming at an enemy helicopter (Fig. 5). He also emulated Saladin, the military leader who fought the Crusaders and regained Palestine.⁷ Again many posters illustrated the two leaders, always with the Dome of the Rock (thus Jerusalem/Palestine) visible in background (Fig. 6). In the late 1990s, a number of large-size statues and busts of Saddam were erected. Among them he is portrayed as the personification of historical figures. These statues were particularly placed to crown the towers of presidential palaces. Four gigantic busts were erected on the main Presidential Palace, where he is shown wearing the military helmet of King Faisal I. Another four, where he wears a medieval type of helmet, like that of Saladin, were placed on the towers of the newly built Palace of Dar Es-Salam. This building was completely gutted during the 2003 war (Fig. 7).

After the first Gulf War, many artists were encouraged or commissioned to illustrate the war. Saddam wanted to immortalize himself as the victor, so he turned to his favorite painter, Khalid al-Rahal, who more than any other artist included motifs from ancient Iraq in his artwork. Rahal designed a monument that combined ancient and Islamic symbols of victories over the enemy (Fig. 8a). The swords are those of the battle of Qadissiyyah, the battle where the Sassanid Persians were defeated by the invading Arab army in Iraq in 636.⁸ The hands are those of Saddam;⁹ a net hangs from each arm filled with the helmets of fallen Iranian soldiers (Fig. 8b). Rahal borrowed

7 Saladin was born in Iraq, possibly a Kurd, but his hometown was Tikrit, the same town of Saddam's birthplace. For posters of Saddam with Nebuchadnezzar, see Fales 2004: 172.

8 The Iraq/Iran war of the 1980s was called Qadisiyyat Saddam.

9 Al-Rahal died before the construction of the monument, and the sculptor Mohammed Ghani was commissioned to finish the work. Ghani made a cast of Saddam's forearms, and the bronze work was done at the Morris singer foundry in Britain.

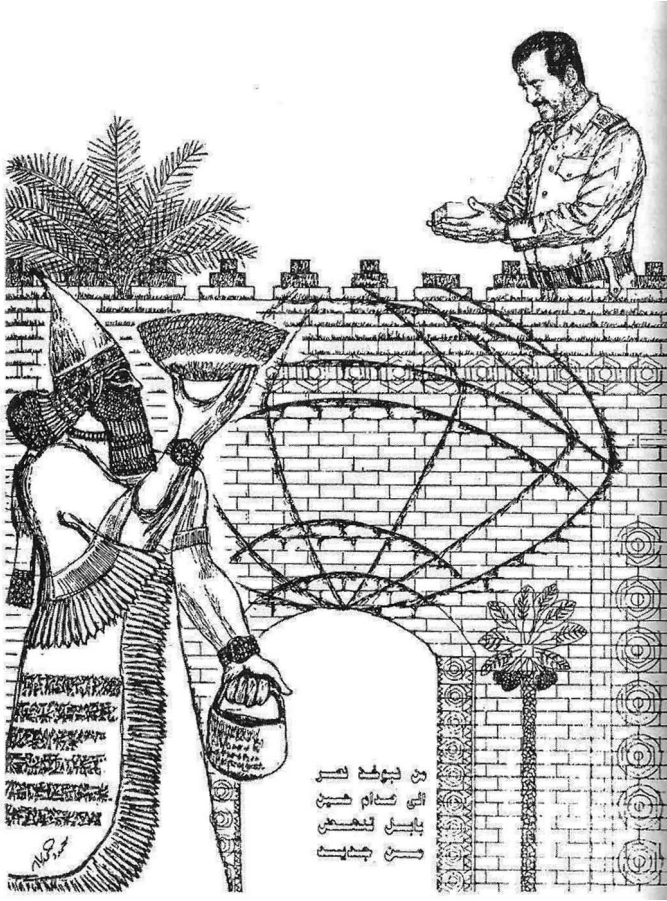


Figure 4: Nebuchadnezzar and Saddam as builder. Fales 2004: 172, no. 3.

this idea from a tradition of victorious monarchs in ancient Iraq, best known from the Stele of the Vultures of Eannatum, depicting the ruler of the Sumerian city-state of Lagash (c. 2460 BCE), where the god Ningursu, the patron god of Girsu, is holding a net filled with the corpses of the fallen enemy (see Winter 1985 for study) (Fig. 9). Thus the whole history and triumph of Iraq is summed up in one monument: Arab Islam (the Sword), ancient Iraq (the net), and modern Iraq is in Saddam forearms (see al-Khalil 1991 for study; note that al-Khalil is a pseudonym of Kanaan Makiya). Similarly, on a poster depicting the Hammurabi Law stele, Saddam replaced the figure of Hammurabi and is shown receiving the laws from the Sun God Shamash.¹⁰

¹⁰ A modern statue of Hammurabi, the work of Mohammad Ghani, stands in front of the National Assembly in Baghdad.



Figure 5: Saddam with bow and arrow. From author's collection of posters.



Figure 6: Postage stamp, Saddam and Saladin. Free Republic, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/fr/560857/posts>.

The Baath Party, whose ideology identifies mainly with Arab history, turned to Iraq's ancient civilization to legitimize its rule of Iraq. Khalid al-Rahal was commissioned to design *The March of the Ba'th' Monument* (Fig. 10). When completed, it stood at the intersection between the Iraq Museum and the main bus station. Made of bronze relief plaques, it covers most of Iraq's history and is crowned with rosettes similar to those decorating the headdresses of the Sumerian women in the Royal Cemetery at Ur. Rahal had used the same motif on the head of the Sumerian queen discussed above (Fig. 2).¹¹

¹¹ Saddam and the Ba'ath party are not the only political entity in the Middle East to use archaeology to further its ideology, for example, so did the Shah of Iran and the government of Israel.



Figure 7: Presidential Palace, busts of Saddam. Bizarre Monuments of Saddam's Iraq; <http://www.michaeljohngrist.com/2009/10/7-bizarre-monuments-of-saddams-iraq/>.



Figure 8a–8b: Victory Arch. Wikimedia, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swords_of_qadisiyah.jpg.

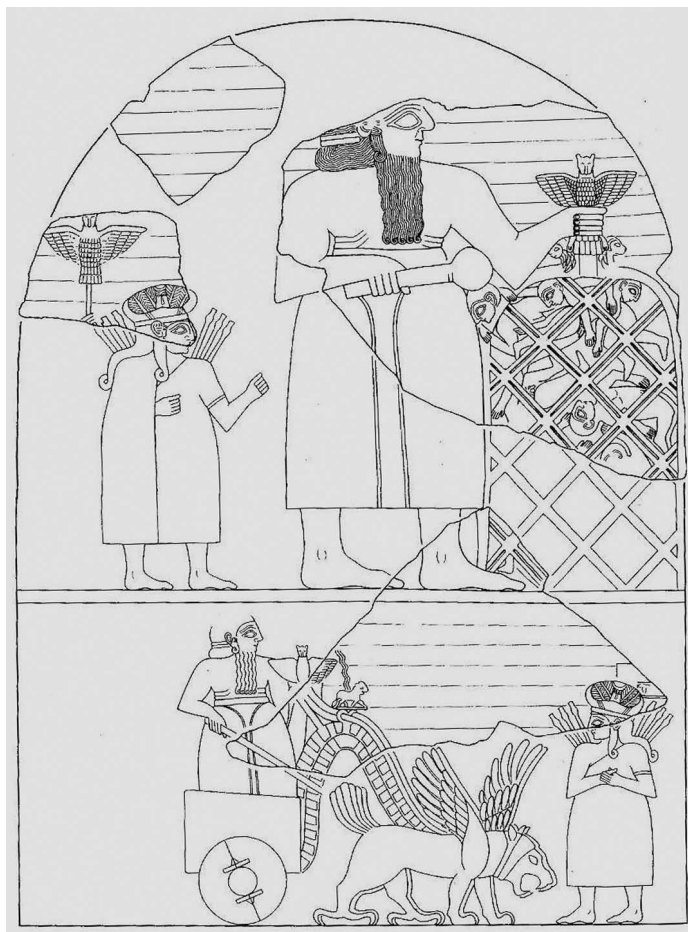


Figure 9: Stele of the Vultures. After Winter 1985: fig. 3.

Islamic history was not forgotten either, especially when Sati' al-Husri became Director of Antiquity (1934–1941). Husri was a well-known Arab nationalist ideologue, who came to the Antiquities Department from the Ministry of Education, where he was instrumental in establishing the curriculum of the schools to include Arabic language and history books. He found that all the excavations in Iraq were conducted by Western expeditions whose main interest was on ancient Iraqi sites; none was excavating an Islamic site. He embarked on restoring the Abbasid buildings in Baghdad, for him a revival of the glory of Arab Baghdad. He saved the last few remaining buildings from the Abbasid Period. Most of them were in a very bad state and were destined for demolition. Baghdad was expanding and a plan was being implemented to open new roads and to build houses. To straighten Rashid Street, at that time the main artery of Baghdad, the Mirjan Mosque had been slated for demolition, as was Khan Mirjan, to

become a row of shops. He lobbied for their preservation and won. However, he lost the medieval South Gate; it was demolished at night by the Lord Mayor of Baghdad. Most of these buildings belonged to other government institutions, particularly the Waqf (Islamic religious endowment), but he doggedly pursued the government to transfer their ownership to the Antiquities Department. He then embarked on their restoration, in particular Khan Mirjan, Al-Mustansiriyah School, and the so-called Abbasid Palace. Because of the dilapidated state of these buildings, it took decades of restoration work to return them to something near their original state.

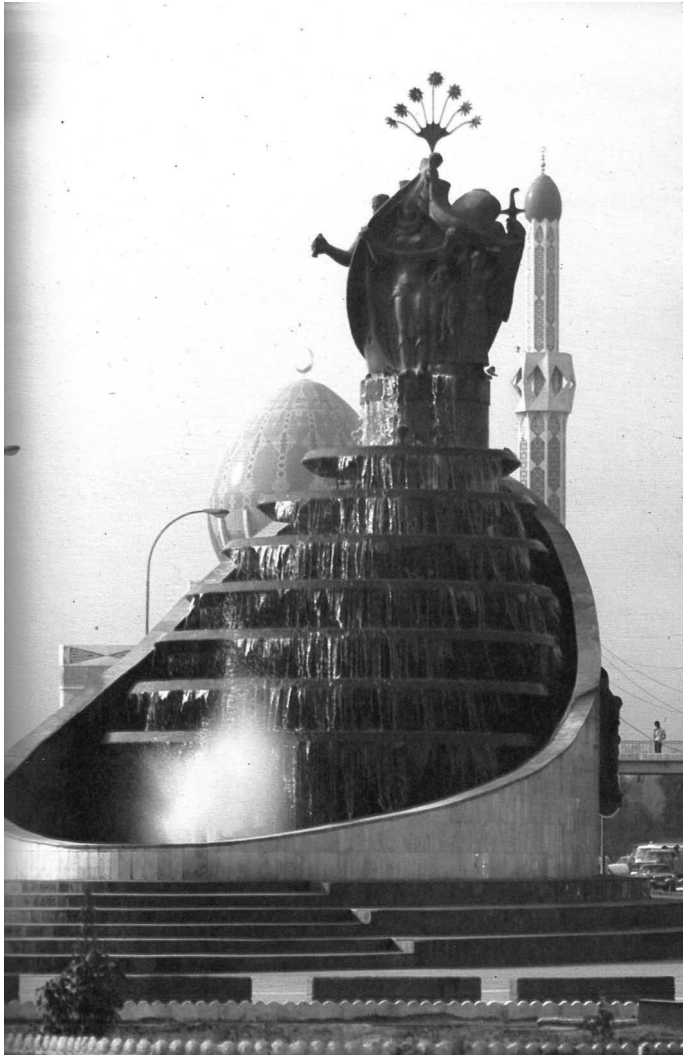


Figure 10: The March of the Ba'ath. After Fethi and Jabra 1987: 146.

Husri, also, formed the first Iraqi expedition to excavate and restore the Islamic sites of Samarra, Kufa and Wassit. The latter was perhaps chosen for ideological reasons, as it was the Umyyad capital in Iraq. Husri was a Syrian who came to Iraq with King Faisal I in 1921.¹² Husri's Islamic and Arab bent was demonstrated in his attempt to alter the design of the forthcoming project of the Iraq Museum. In 1934, the German architect Werner March designed the museum with ancient Babylonian houses and town plans in mind. The offices ran around courtyards, the interior walls were made of ceramic that looked like bricks and the building consisted of one ground floor with the outside walls of dressed brick. The museum is a remarkable and rather unassuming Art Deco-inspired building, but built with bricks. In the archive of the Iraq Museum are documents that reveal Husri trying to pressure the architect to add some Arabic or Islamic decoration to the entrance and the adjacent tower, with the justification that among the exhibits will be Islamic antiquities. This was resisted by the architect, who insisted that he was commissioned to design a museum for ancient antiquities. The project was shelved due to the outbreak of World War II, only to be resumed in 1954. Again the archive's documents show that the issue of adding Islamic decoration, particularly to the tower, had reached the level of the cabinet. Again the architect resisted complying, and he seemed to have succeeded in keeping the original plan. The Iraq Museum as we know it today was finally opened in 1966. However, the idea of adding an Arab/Islamic gate to the museum was again resurrected in the 1980s, and in line with Baathist Arab ideology, an Islamic style façade was erected.¹³

In the early years of Iraq's existence, the Department of Antiquities and the Iraq Museum were considered places of learning. If King Faisal I showed any interest it was due to Gertrude Bell. The two later kings Gazi and Faisal II would visit the museum on official and special occasions. But the museum, from the day it opened, was very popular with ordinary people, particularly when it was in the old building, situated in the center of Baghdad near the main shopping area. The gates were flanked by terracotta lions from the Old Babylonian site of Tell Harmal, and inside the gate were two Assyrian winged bulls from Nimrud.¹⁴

The government considered that no political harm would emanate from the Department or the Museum so it left the directors and curators to run them with no interference. However, when the government wanted to dispense with a well-known politician, who was at the same time cultured, well respected and difficult to sack, they would appoint him Director General of Antiquities. When Gertrude Bell began to

¹² Husri is known to Western archaeologists for the 1936 Antiquities Law, much resisted by the Europeans, because it benefited the Iraqis, particularly in the division of the antiquities (see discussion in both Lloyd 1947 and Bernhardson 2005).

¹³ An attempt to remove the above façade in 2003 was abandoned for fear of damaging the brick wall.

¹⁴ When I joined the Iraq Museum in 1961, my room was at the top of the stairs that led to the first Prehistoric room. It was heartening watching ordinary veiled women in their black abbayas holding their shopping bags going into the museum, curious about what they were going to see.

clash with the young Iraqi politicians who were eager to show their independence, King Faisal I appointed her as the Honorary Director of Antiquities. Similarly, when Sati' al-Husri was having trouble with the young Iraqis in the Ministry of Education, particularly those who had returned from studying in Europe full of new ideas about education and who were frustrated with Husri's Ottoman teaching, he was appointed Director of Antiquities. When Husri was sacked in 1941 for his support of the Rashid Ali coup against the royal family and the government, Youssif Ghanimah, a former Finance Minister and the author of historical books, was appointed in his place (1941–1944). At the time, he was suffering from the first stages of Parkinson disease. One benefit to the Antiquities Department deriving from his appointment was that it was upgraded to a Directorate General, since Ghanimah had previously held the rank of a cabinet minister, which precluded him from holding the position of just the director of a department. By 1944 another cultured politician was appointed, Naji al-Aseel, a diplomat and a former Foreign Minister. He had been in the government of Hikmat Suleiman, who was involved in a failed military coup in 1939. The government was sacked, and Naji al-Aseel was forcibly retired from public service. He went into self-exile and stopped engaging in public politics. Reconciliation took place in 1944 and he was offered the nonpolitical position of Director of Antiquities.

It should be noted that these high profile politicians who were sent to the Department of Antiquities as a form of cultural exile proved themselves to be the best Directors of Antiquities in the early years of the department's formation. Bell established the foundation of the administration; with the legislation of the 1924 Antiquities Law, she tried to regulate archaeological expeditions, the division of the antiquities and to limit the illicit digging of the ancient sites and sale of objects, and she established the Iraq Museum. Sati' al-Husri legislated the 1936 Antiquities Law, replacing Bell's 1924 one that had been more in favor of Western archaeologists. The 1936 law became the basis for the revised laws in 1959 and again in 2002. Husri organized the first Iraqi-led excavations and embarked on the restoration of the Islamic sites. He was successful in getting the government to allocate a plot of land for a new museum, something Bell had failed to persuade the cabinet to do, although before her death she obtained the old Law School, which served as the Iraq Museum until 1963, when the antiquities moved to the newly built site in 1966. During the Period of Naji al-Aseel, most of the major Iraqi excavations began, such as at Hatra, the Hellenistic-Parthian city in northeastern Iraq. The first restoration and excavation works at Nimrud and Babylon were undertaken, and the foundation for the new Iraq Museum was laid.¹⁵

¹⁵ The story of building the Iraq Museum started in 1934 with Husri, then building began in 1954 during the time of Naji al-Aseel. It continued in the time of Taha Baqir and was completed when Faisal al-Wailey was director. In political terms four different governments changed hands, each with a different ideology, but the Iraq Museum escaped any interference.



Figure 11: Iraqi republic symbol. Wikimedia, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iraq_state_emblem_CoA_1959-1965_Qassem.svg.

Two aspects in choosing the directors of antiquities changed after the 1958 coup that toppled the monarchy and made Iraq a republic. It was now a requirement that the director be an archaeologist and that politically he agree with the government.¹⁶ After 37 years of the country's existence, its ancient history was recognized in the new emblem of the Republic of Iraq (Fig. 11). The star symbol of the goddess Ishtar and the wavy rays of the sun god Shamash were part of the design made by Iraq's foremost artist Jawad Salim. He was a graduate from the Institute of Arts and had worked in the Antiquities Department in the 1930s.¹⁷ It had been a remarkable journey from the spectacular archaeological discoveries nearly a hundred years previously. It was not only a recognition that Iraq's ancient history resonated with the present, but the new symbol of Iraq showed the world that Iraq's ancient history had a global significance. But the history, arts and culture of a country are fragile entities, easily distorted by unscrupulous politicians, as we have seen above by Saddam Hussein and others keen to appropriate and use them for their own devices.

Neglect and bad management too are the enemy of a country's cultural heritage. And this is what has happened in Iraq over the last fifty years. It began with the formation of the republic, when politics began creeping into the day-to-day running of the Antiquities Department. During the Qassim government, Taha Baqir was appointed director. As a professional Assyriologist he wanted to continue work with the archaeological projects of restoration at a number of sites, including Babylon, Samarra and Nimrud, which required enormous funds that he obtained by yielding to government pressure to hire leftist staff. This trend became more obvious when the

¹⁶ By the end of the 1950s, there were a number of qualified archaeologists, many of whom had studied in Europe, such as Taha Baqir, Fuad Safar and Faraj Basmachi.

¹⁷ When designing the Freedom Monument in Tahrir Square in Baghdad in 1959, he apparently had the Assyrian palace relief in mind (personal communication with Rifaat Chadirji).

Baathist party came to power in 1968. Then it became almost obligatory for the top positions in the Antiquities Department to be held by members of the party regardless of their qualifications. Those who did not toe the line were not promoted, were sacked or occasionally transferred to other ministries.¹⁸

In addition to political pressure, the Iraq/Iran war had an adverse effect on the archaeologists, a number of whom had to join the army. Subsequently, a few lost their lives or ended up as prisoners of war in Iran. Some archaeologists with their children left Iraq afraid their sons would be conscripted. It was at this time that the militarization of the staff at the Antiquities Department began; many had to wear military uniform at work, particularly those who had joined the party. The hemorrhage of the best-qualified archaeologists started in the 1970s. I may have been the first to leave, more left in the 1980s, and one can say an exodus took place in the 1990s after the invasion of Kuwait. Due to the imposition of international sanctions and the collapse of the Iraqi currency, salaries were reduced to about \$10 a month, prompting a number to work in the Gulf States and other Arab countries.¹⁹ As a consequence of the international sanctions, all foreign archaeological excavations stopped and visiting scholars were seldom seen in the museum, cutting off Iraqi archaeologists from new developments, which was compounded by the lack of any new publications. However, Muayad Said Dimirji, who was the Director of Antiquities in the 1980s and 90s, took advantage of the annual Babylon Festival and started an annual archaeological seminar to which Western scholars were invited, giving Iraqi archaeologists an opportunity to meet them.

Although the Antiquities Directorate had been upgraded to a State Board, Muayad Said Dimirji, who had been director since 1977, was transferred to the Ministry of Culture in 1999, and no Director General has been appointed since. There has been a series of acting directors, which has had a negative effect on archaeological activities that was compounded by the looting of the Iraq Museum in April 2003 and the chaos that engulfed the country afterward. In addition, with the new restructuring of the government departments, the State Board was left “in the lurch,” not knowing which ministry it was going to be attached to. Would it be the newly formed Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities or would it stay with the Ministry Culture? The uncertainty of

18 I was one of the first members of the staff to be considered undesirable to stay at the Iraq Museum, but as I had no political activity and thus was difficult to sack, I was transferred in 1969 to the Ministry of Education with the intention of becoming a primary school teacher. Because I held only a BA degree, the authorities in the Museum expected me to resign. It was a great disappointment to them when I managed to get a position at the UNESCO department in the ministry, and thus did not resign as expected. I left Iraq for Britain in 1970.

19 Many Iraqi archaeologists went on scholarships to Europe and the United States to study for higher degrees. By 1970 there were more than a dozen of them at the Antiquities Department and even more at the university. However, by 2003 Dr. Jabir Khalil, then the Director of Antiquities, was the only one at the Department with a Ph.D. from Britain.

its fate left the staff in limbo and inertia. As an example of this standstill, the inventory of the antiquities objects in the museum has only started recently. In January 2012, new legislation was established and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities took over responsibility for the museum. According to the new legislation, the position of director was scrapped, to be taken by one of the minister's deputies. As of the writing of this article in December 2012, no Deputy Minister has been appointed yet.

Perhaps more serious than the administrative mismanagement is that over the years there has been a loss of expertise and a brain-drain of qualified people. Iraq's cultural heritage remains neglected and uncared for, pillaged and in chaos.

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Forgeries of Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts and Cultures

Abstract: The thrust of this article is diverse: to present the historical and cultural backgrounds for the existence of numerous forgeries of Ancient Near Eastern antiquities prevalent in numerous private collections and public museums throughout the world as well as in countless scholarly publications of alleged ancient artifacts; to discuss the roles of archaeologist, scholars, and museum curators for the success of their existence and acceptance as ancient objects; and to review how the consequences of how such activities and behavior have distorted and perverted modern understanding among students, scholars and the public concerning the history and culture of many ancient polities and cultures, and not only for the Ancient Near East. Reviewed is the history and background of 19th and early 20th century forgery creations and the post-World War II acceleration of their manufacture, together with the respective modern cultural causes for their manufacture and, ignorant or not, acceptance. The trigger for the acceleration resulted from an increase of archaeological excavations and the increase of plundering of ancient sites and tombs, activities that both produced extraordinary artifacts. And soon thereafter, museums and private collectors demanded antiquities from dealers – to fulfill their display of wealth and power.

Keywords: antiquities, fakes, forgeries, museology, museum collecting, private collecting

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Introduction

“What one man can invent, another man can discover.”
(Sherlock Holmes, in *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*)

A comprehensive examination of forgery issues commences with two facts: when museum and private collecting occurs, modern forgeries have been manufactured; and they flourish in *all* archaeological, cultural, and artistic spheres from all chronological periods of the world’s cultures. Irrespective of which cultural or chronological periods of art or antiquities are involved, forgeries have continuously been manufactured and subsequently purchased as authentic works, no matter how sumptuous or minor the object may appear to be. The background for the enduring existence of

forgeries, often concomitantly supplied with a forged provenance, and their certification as genuine productions by scholars and museum curators in various publications are basically the same.

The acquisition of forgeries followed by scholarly acceptance primarily involves ignorance, but also personal or institutional dissimulation and deception (Muscarella 1977a: 164, 169, fns. 43, 68). Forgeries exist within the corpus of antiquities from all chronological periods and geographical backgrounds of ancient cultures, whether it is Ancient Near Eastern, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, Pre-Columbian.¹ The very same problems obtain for past and recent European as well as contemporary art, and all varieties of “collectibles,” (for example, Jones 1990) such as furniture, jewelry, coins, sculpture, stamps, musical instruments, scrimshaws (whale tooth engravings), shrunken Jivaro heads (South America), wine bottles, diaries (for example, Hitler’s), letters, maps, historical documents (such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; Jones 1990: 70–72). Forgeries are made to deceive, to be sold. They exist to satisfy collectors’ cultural and personal needs. As long as antiquities continue to be purchased, forgeries will continue to be made and sold. And they are unceasingly being sheltered in museum and collector showcases all over the world, which is why forgers and their children – as well as those who seek to expose them – have lifetime jobs.

Addressing forgeries of ancient cultures, one commences with didactic declarations: without being aware of the vast quantity of destroyed sites that produce countless genuine antiquities, followed by the manufacture of forgeries of alleged plundered antiquities, all sold together in the marketplaces, it is not possible for scholars and students of archaeology, not to mention the public, to anticipate and recognize them and refrain from contextualizing them into proper archaeological research. Although some archaeologists, museum curators and collectors refer to their purchases as antiquities, only the *unexcavated* ones are correctly labeled antiquities; the excavated are correctly labeled artifacts. This distinction is not pedantic, considering that forgeries occur solely within the former category. Imperative for accurately identifying the historical nature of an antiquity is to comprehend that all *genuine* antiquities have been plundered from destroyed and now non-existing or damaged sites, tombs and mounds; and that forgeries are proffered as antiquities derived therein. Plunder and forgeries are interrelated enterprises. Without plunder there would be no forgeries: the former is a *sine qua non* for the latter. Ignorance of these matters readily facilitates forgeries of ancient art and artifacts to be prevalent in numerous public and private venues *and* in scholarly publications, thereby sabotaging archaeological research and deductions and destabilizing archaeological and historical reality.

¹ For Pre-Columbian forgeries, see Coe 1993; also valuable on the nature of forgeries in general are Feder 2006; Jones 1999; and Kelkner and Bruhns 2010.

Scholarly knowledge of why forgeries are made and the acute consequences of their acceptance as genuine artifacts engage a cluster of archaeological, historical and cultural problems. Ignorance deflates scholarly awareness that forgeries are not merely an aesthetic, a museum, or an “art” problem, that in fact they are an essential constituent of the archaeological discipline’s goal to accurately reconstruct and make known the world’s past cultural histories.

Forgeries of artifacts and iconographies from every ancient Near Eastern culture have been manufactured. It is difficult to name an artifact class that has not been forged. They include, in many forms and variations: human and animal sculptures and reliefs, pottery, vessels, jewelry, pins, plaques, cylinder and stamp seals, tablets, armor, horse equipment, etc. They are manufactured from all the materials used in antiquity: gold, silver, bronze, ivory, clay, and stone (Unger 1957–71: 7–8; Muscarella 2000a). They comprise copies of typical artifacts and iconography from specific polities or cultures; imaginative modifications of known artifact forms and iconography that are interpreted to be general Mesopotamian or Iranian productions; new and fictional configurations unknown in ancient works and ingenuously labeled as unique; a cast of a genuine artifact; pastiches, that is, the joining together of several objects, all of which could be ancient or a mixture of ancient and forged units; ancient unadorned artifacts, which, to increase their market value, are embellished with added religious and genre scenes. Forgers’ creations also include copied inscriptions, or strange, unparalleled signs identified as a hitherto unknown script (Muscarella 1995: 451; 2008b: 655; Feder 2006: 132–34, 160–64; Jones 1999: 153).

The consequence of these activities is that fictional constructions have negligently been accepted by scholars and incorporated into archaeological discourse apropos the alleged productions of a particular polity, thereby (unknowingly or otherwise) collaborating with the forgers (Muscarella 1995: 451–53; 2000a: 9, 16–18). The precise number of ancient Near Eastern forgeries may never be recorded, even were one to document those published in disparate venues, for numerous examples remain unpublished in dealers shops and private collections, visible to a selected few. Nevertheless, it is certain that countless fakes have been created since the 1950s (Muscarella 2000a: 9).

Forgeries in the Near East: The Case of Iran

Forgeries of ancient antiquities, mainly of Mesopotamian and Syria-Palestine backgrounds, have been made for a long time. They were prevalent in the 19th and early decades of the 20th centuries, available chiefly in local bazaars to tourists and collectors. A good number were recognized by a number of contemporary scholars.²

² Clermont-Ganneau 1885; Ménant 1887; Hilprecht 1894: 131–32; Banks 1904–05; Vayson De Pradenne 1932, which is still among the best publications on forgeries; Unger 1934, 1957–1971.

Plundering, and concomitantly forgery production, of Near Eastern antiquities in general increased after the plunder of the site of Ziwiye in Iran in 1947 and quickened extensively thereafter. In fact, Iran had endured concentrated incidents of plundering, beginning in the late 1920s, when quantities of its antiquities appeared on the market, deriving primarily from plundered tombs in Luristan. In this large region only one site has ever been excavated, that of Surkh Dum (by Erich Schmidt, in 1938), and beginning in the 1960s a good number of incompletely plundered cemeteries were excavated (by the Belgian archaeologist L. vanden Berghe and his students), fortunately yielding many artifacts. In the Luristan repertory there are countless unexcavated genuine antiquities, and hundreds of forgeries, integrated together and sold in Iranian and European bazaars.³ In the 1920s and 1930s local workers at archaeological sites in Iraq created forgeries (terracottas readily baked in villagers' bread ovens), pretending they had excavated them, because at that time, to encourage their efforts, dig workers were given *bakshish* (a tip) for each artifact recovered (Unger 1957–1971: 6; Muscarella 1977a: 158). These locally forged objects were then included in the final archaeological publications as excavated: an archaeologist digging at Zincirli in Turkey received as a gift a forgery (unknown to him) from a local and published it as found near his site. Subsequently, three other archaeologists cited it as excavated at Zincirli (Muscarella 2000a: 181, no. 24).

Invariably plundering occurs soon after a major archaeological discovery or an exceptional plundered find was publicized, for example, in Iran at Ziwiye, Marlik, Hasanlu, the Kalmakara Cave, and several cemeteries south of the town of Jiroft. Immediately thereafter forgers commenced their activities, their creations merged together with genuine antiquities and claimed to have been found at these sites. A silver beaker from Hasanlu was soon replicated by a forger (Fig. 1, right). Much of the excavated Marlik material is sumptuous and carefully constructed – qualities that appeal to all collectors, and hence to forgers. Ninety percent of the metal vessels published over the years as from Marlik and other Northwestern Iranian sites derive from dealers, about fifty percent of which are forgeries (Fig. 2, right), and only ten percent of the corpus consists of excavated artifacts.⁴ Beginning in 1947 hundreds of genuine and exotic gold, silver and ivory objects appeared (in collections worldwide), alleged by antiquities dealers to have come from Ziwiye (or the nearby site of Kaplantu); more than 40 forgeries are known (Muscarella 1977b: 211–12; 2000a: 76–81).

Many Achaemenian Persian period forgeries exist (Muscarella 2000a: 44–72), including vessels, jewelry, and many relief sculptures (Fig. 3, right, is manifestly a forgery). Regarding the latter, sometimes a museum purchase can create a misunder-

³ For a summary of plunder, forgeries, and excavations in Luristan, see Muscarella 1988: 112–206; 2000a: 81–119.

⁴ Löw 1993: 37–38; 1998: 525–62; Muscarella; 2000a: 9, 31–75; 2008a: 14, figs. 7a, b; for Jiroft forgeries, mostly made of stone, see Muscarella 2001: 179–97.

standing regarding what is a forgery. I assessed as forgeries three crudely made stone reliefs, poorly modeled after those from Persepolis and purchased by the Brooklyn Museum as ancient, and thus I labeled them forgeries (Muscarella 1977a: nos. 131, 132). I later realized that they were not originally made to be forgeries, but were adaptations made in Iran during the 19th century Qajar period (Muscarella 2000a: 46, nos. 12 a, b); there exists several other similar examples in a private collection, all, as in Brooklyn, labeled as from ancient Persepolis.



Figure 1: Left: Beaker excavated at Hasanlu with drawing by Grace Freed Muscarella; Right: A forgery. Muscarella 2000: 285.



Figure 2: Left: Excavated beaker from Marlik; Right: A forgery. Musée Rath (1966) *Tresors de l'ancien Iran*. Exposition: 8 juin–25 sept.: pl. 19.



Figure 3: Left: Achaemenian relief; Right: A forgery. Muscarella 2000a: 291.

Another provenience attribution deserves mention. In the late 19th century the British Museum acquired a group of gold and silver objects said to be Achaemenian antiquities deriving from the Oxus River area, where they had been purchased. Not one was excavated, and among them are forgeries (the Museum admits many of the coins are counterfeit). But all the objects, all purchased, are referred to as the Treasure of the Oxus, and in some instances, a specific locus is named. Then in 2002 the MIHO Museum in Japan published about 2500 purchased objects, which, in bazaar archaeological terminology, was labeled the Oxus Treasure 2, a treasure consisting of many forgeries (Muscarella 2003b).

Perhaps the most substantial assemblages of forgeries asserted to have been “found in Iran” or neighboring areas are those labeled Sasanian, a major polity in southwestern Iran (224–651 CE). Literally in the hundreds, they began to appear in the late 1950s and increased thereafter. Although the corpus comprises gold and silver vessels and plates (Fig. 4) presently owned by numerous museums and collectors worldwide (Muscarella 2000a: 203–204, 215, 528–35), not a single example of such Sasanian objects has been excavated in Iran or from nearby areas, an issue that scholars have ignored. The antiquity dealer A.U. Pope published in the *Illustrated London News* (Pope 1950) Sasanian vessels, asserting they had been “unearthed” (the unearther unnamed) in the Caspian Sea area: notwithstanding that three years previously the archaeologist Roman Ghirshman published one of these vessels as having derived from the Caucasus: it is a forgery provided by an archaeologist with a forged provenience (Pope 1950: 204).

Pope was one of the most prominent dealers in Iranian cultural material of all periods. He warrants special examination because for decades he was the archetype of a flourishing dealer, this because of his brilliance and, not the least, his successful



Figure 4: Forgery of a Sassanian plate.
Antiquities Market.

dissimulations, one being falsely representing himself as an archaeologist. Throughout his career he (and his wife Phyllis Ackerman) sold genuine antiquities and forgeries, vigorously denying the quantity in existence of the latter and providing provenances for both categories; he also viciously berated archaeologists (especially Ezat Neghaban) who opposed plunder (Muscarella 1999; 2000a: 7–8, 25–28, fns. 7, 11, 210–11, fn. 38).

Collecting, the Antiquities Market, Looting and Forgeries

The continuous emergence of plundered Iranian antiquities in worldwide markets resulted in massive museum and collector demands for “antiquities,” encouraging dealers to meet this demand by forging antiquities for them. The desire to purchase antiquities and the associated manufacture of forgeries are ineluctably linked. Beginning in the early 1960s a major spur in public exhibitions (and selling) of Iranian antiquities commenced. A series of travelling exhibitions located in museums, each producing a catalogue, was organized collectively by scholars, dealers, and museum staffs, communally writing descriptions and providing alleged provenances (for example, *Kunstschätze aus Iran*, 1962; *Sept Mille Ans d’Art en Iran*, 1962; *Trésors de L’Ancien Iran*, 1966). They contained not a single excavated antiquity; all the hundreds of antiquities published were plundered, and possessed by dealers and collectors, the latter sometimes disguised as “coll. Particulière” or “Privatbesitz,” or owned by named museums. The catalogues were nothing less than sales venues, and large quantities of the material presented are forgeries. As intended, the exhibitions and catalogues succeeded in encouraging both more plunder and more collections of antiquities – and forgeries (Löw 1998: 541, fn. 65; Muscarella 2000a: 34).

As noted, the market distribution process of selling forgeries overlaps that of selling plundered antiquities. The latter are sold by the local plunderers to nearby dealers who pass them to couriers who arrange the smuggling abroad. Dealers who employ forgers pass them to the same couriers, who thereby serve both the plunderers and forgers. William Coe (1993: 273–75, fig. 5) has neatly outlined the full process (but neglecting to inform us that he is a very active collector of Pre-Columbian artifacts). And slyly incorporating forgeries into their corpus of ancient plundered antiquities, dealers offer for sale both categories concurrently, each equally camouflaged as a “recent acquisition,” or from Site X, and sell them for thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars. Inasmuch as antiquities are acquired to confer prestige, power, and display of wealth, they also function for donors to museums as tax deduction investments through higher evaluations gained over time. Hence, every museum and private collection throughout the world, even national and university museums of antiquity-producing nations (Israel and Iran, for example), have antiquities and forgeries in their possession. Also, it is normal practice for museum staffs, to claim in museum-speak that they purchased their antiquities “in good faith”: a cliché defensive, and legal, term, which correctly read means “our deceit cannot be traced” (Muscarella 2000a: 2, 537–40; Muscarella 2012b). As long as collecting continues, plundering and its market agents will thrive, and forgeries will continue to be manufactured and sold (Unger 1934; 1957–71: 5).

To enhance the value of both their genuine and forged antiquities, dealers allege they had been found at a specific named site or regional area: Marlik, Hamadan, Hacilar, Bactria, the Caucasus, Mesopotamia, and so forth. But unmentioned in dealers’ sales catalogues is that the locus informer was a plunderer, a dealer, whose attributions are thereafter accepted by the purchasers as well as scholars as an archaeological reality. Consequently, countless unexcavated antiquities are displayed in museum vitrines and published in scholarly articles and books as having derived from the proffered sites (De Pradenne 1932: 586). This conduct constructs a forgery of provenience (or provenance), and when a forgery is accepted with a forged site name, we confront a double forgery. Their only original provenance is a dealer’s shop in Switzerland, England, Germany, Iran, the United States, etc. (Muscarella 1995; 2000a: 15–17; 2000b; 2003a; 2003b). Note that the term provenience should only be employed for an excavated artifact’s site; provenance is the label for the alleged, plundered site, or for the (unexcavated) antiquities’ modern locations: a dealer’s shop and museum or collector ownership.

The magnitude of the problems created by forgeries, the methods required detecting them, and an appreciation of how they sabotage archaeology’s aims – the preservation of the world’s cultural history – is still not fully comprehended. When forgeries are accepted as ancient creations jointly with genuine plundered antiquities they are equally employed as evidence of ancient cultural procedures. This solecism occurs in large part because forgery issues have not been normal components of art historical and archaeological education (Muscarella 1977a: 161–63; Muscarella 2012b).

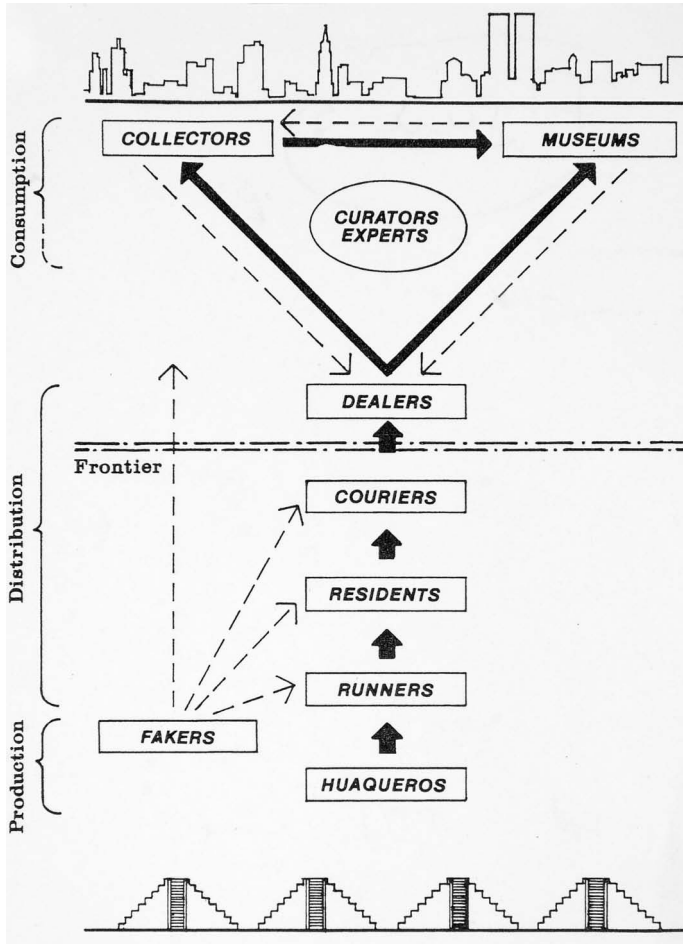


Figure 5: Plunder Chart. From Coe 1993: fig. 1.

But the deficiency is slowly changing and a perception of these problems has begun to circulate in the classrooms and in publications (for example, Löw 1993; 1998: 278–419, 525–62; Muscarella 1977a; 2000a).

The Style and Science of Forgeries

Addressing detection first, one begins with connoisseurship, that is, knowledge of stylistic patterns and details, representations of specific iconographic features and motifs, depictions of human and animal forms, etc., represented within a specific culture's repertory. And equally important is knowledge of manufacturing methods,

that is, casting, hammering, joining. Too few archaeologists are cognizant of this (Coe 1993: 272–73; Muscarella 2000a: 9–10; Kelkner and Bruhns 2010: 25–26, 123–26); indeed, the term *connoisseurship* is devalued by some self-labeled “anthropological archaeologists,” because to them it is a derided “art” term. Scientific methodologies also help determine age, such as analyses of corrosion, patinas, as well as thermoluminescence. But it has become known that forgers monitor the technologies involved in detecting forgeries, hence, “scientific” analyses are too often flawed, or corruptly determined. Although testing for corrosion patina on bronze antiquities has long been a scientific test yielding absolute results regarding their age, it is now recognized that patinas can be created over forged objects to mimic ancient accumulation (see Muscarella 2008a for the above).

Thermoluminescence testing dates the time a terracotta object was made by determining how long ago it was baked. To confound such analysis, forgers create works comprised of ancient clays or terracotta units formed together with their new creations, such as pottery, figurines, plaques, etc. (Kelker and Bruhns 2010: 31–32). Or they graft a genuine ancient vessel base below their freshly made one, well aware that scientists will only test the (ancient) base, so as not to damage the vessel itself, thereby skewing TL investigations (Muscarella 2008a: 12–13, fig. 2). Further, forgers soon learned to submit their terracotta productions to intensive X-rays, which skews the revealed chronology. Ivory carvings are tested for the presence of carbon and nitrogen, absent in ancient ivory (Baer and Indictor 1978). Carbon-14 testing is helpful, but limited to organic materials, and it is critically burdened by local climatic and magnetic disturbances that alter the actual recorded historical date of the object tested, facts sometimes ignored by scholars. A few scientists claim that they can date gold as ancient or modern, but this claim is rightly rejected by others (Muscarella 2008a: 13).

Some forgers are accomplished artisans, and their capabilities and research activities cannot be underestimated. Nonetheless, a large quantity of their productions (some perhaps made by apprentices) betrays unskilled workmanship and incorrect technologies, or depict misunderstood and artistically flawed scenes clearly evident to the knowledgeable eye. Despite these anomalies, vendors, collectors, and equally curators and scholars often defend them by sophisticated interpretations. If grossly made or deviating from normal productions, they defend them as a “provincial” production, or rare, a *unikum*, that is, a deviation from the canon, or deriving from a hitherto (now revealed for the first time) unknown polity, or reflecting different skills and talents, and discredit those who say the naked emperor has no clothes (Muscarella 2000a: 7–8; 2001: 178). Often dealers or collectors defend a forgery they possess, arguing that no forger could have made it, it is too good (for example, Muscarella 2000a: 24, 109, fn. 31; and not only with Ancient Near Eastern forgeries: see Kelker and Bruhns 2010: 17).

Spotting Forgeries – Some Examples

Most forgeries are recognizable to a trained *and* disinterested eye, an ability acquired solely by one who studies and observes style and details associated with *excavated* artifacts, the essence of acquiring knowledge of ancient designs, techniques, and styles. To be capable of formulating accurate decisions takes years of hands-on research and examination, again of excavated ancient artifacts. This involves studying a culture's methods of construction, the range of materials used, styles and motifs employed, the fashion in which they portray details such as eyes, ears, hair, hand and feet positioning, clothing decoration, and so forth, aspects often ignored by too many scholars and curators. They look but do not see.

I present but a few examples of deviations from the above data, constructional and other. The Berlin Museum curator Wolfram Nagel (1970) sumptuously published color photographs of two painted stone female figurines he had purchased, proclaiming, from his desk in Berlin, that they derived from Hacilar, a major Neolithic site in south central Anatolia (Fig. 6, right). That no excavated Hacilar figurine was made from stone is indeed recognized, but this fact was euphemized as “*ein Novum*,” thus revealing its rarity in antiquity – in museum-speak, providing prestige for his museum. But not mentioned is that all excavated figurines from Hacilar have their thighs joined together (Fig. 6, left), not, as in Berlin's “*Novum*,” separated. Further unmentioned is that one of the figurines has a non-Hacilar clown's smile, and that excavated painted figurines are rare at Hacilar. Nevertheless, the modern figurines were vigorously defended as ancient (*contra* Muscarella 1977a: nos. 221, 222) by the Mesopotamian scholar Eva Strommenger (1976–77: 321; see also Muscarella 1980–81: 120).

Numerous Hacilar forgeries exist in numerous museums and collections, there baptized as ancient productions. Eight are in the Louvre, where one of its curators informs us that a unique figurine introduces evidence of a hitherto unknown “*mythologie certainment [sic] très archaïque*,” avoiding the fact that it is not *archaïque* but *jeune*, as it was recently forged. All excavated Hacilar figurines were made by bonding spiral coils together, but two figurines in the Metropolitan Museum of Art are constructed in one piece (Muscarella 2000a: 135–41). The Ankara Museum has a large collection of confiscated Hacilar forgeries, clearly recognized as such by the museum staff and not on display.

Two gold beakers in the MIHO Museum in Japan published as deriving from the major northwestern Iran site of Marlik (but not disclosing how they came to Japan), have, in addition to crude, manifestly non-Marlik style decorative scenes, bases that were separately added, a characteristic unmatched on any excavated Marlik vessel, where all vessels were hammered from one sheet of gold. This crucial manufacturing technique was unknown to the forger, whose ignorance was explained by some scholars as reflecting a construction date earlier than the excavated vessels (Muscarella 2000a: 37–38, nos. 40, 41; 2008a: 14, fig. 7a, b).



Figure 6: Left: Excavated at Hacilar; Right: Two forgeries. Muscarella 2000a: 438–439.



Figure 7: “Ziwiye” ivory plaque forgery. Muscarella 2000a: 397.

A small ivory Assyrian-style plaque (Fig. 7) depicts an archer on a truncated horse (one of several misunderstandings of the forger) shooting an enemy with a bow held in his left hand, an unknown position in the ancient Near East, where the right hand was always privileged in human activities (Muscarella 2000a: 80, no. 40, 377; also 94, no. 1).

A Louvre Museum curator proclaimed from his Paris office that an unparalleled scene on an unexcavated purchased (and forged) object revealed important, indeed new, hitherto unknown information about early Zoroastrian religious ideology (Muscarella: 2000a: 85, no. 6).

The dominance of forgers is also indicated by their successful (albeit unintentional) ability to help fabricate, from a corpus of their modern creations, the seventh-sixth centuries BCE artifact history – its forms and style – of the pre-Achaemenian Medes, a polity in western Iran. Primarily it was curators who conceived the inter-

pretation that a corpus of odd antiquities resembling, but not quite the same as, Achaemenian-fashioned objects was therefore made by the Medes. This contrived conclusion was concocted predominantly from (unexcavated) forgeries of Achaemenian antiquities. In actuality, the forgers thought they were cunningly creating *varieties* of Achaemenian objects, which aim was transmogrified by scholars into their own forgery: Median forgeries, and a forged history. To date, not a single recognized excavated Median artifact is known (Muscarella 1987; 2000a: 73–75).

But even trained eyes and minds have problems. I offer two complex instances that continue to perplex scholars. One of the most knotty problems regarding determining if an unexcavated object is a forgery or not, and where archaeologists and philologists cannot agree, concerns two unexcavated stone statues of Gudea, the King of Lagash (late third millennium BCE). The time of manufacture of the statues has caused ongoing straightforward disagreements between them, and to date remains unresolved. A number of Gudea statues had been excavated at the city of Girsu in the late 19th century. Then in the 1920s a cluster of Gudea statues suddenly appeared in the art market, some ancient, others recognized to be forgeries. One of these statues is now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 8, right), another in the Detroit Institute of Arts (Fig. 8, left). To me and others, based on stylistic analysis, the Metropolitan Museum statue is ancient, but the one in Detroit is considered by the same scholars to be a forgery. However, the inscription of the Metropolitan Gudea is considered by all philologists who have studied it to be a recent addition, because to them its inscribed statue name is not conceivable for an ancient inscription, whereas that on the Detroit statue is to them most certainly ancient. Here we have a true paradox, a complex conundrum in the antiquities vs. the excavated artifact problem (Muscarella 2000a: 172–73; 2005).



Figure 8: Gudea statues: Left: Detroit Museum of Art; Right: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Although not from the Near East, an additional example of a forgery forging history (here in Italy) is an unexcavated gold fibula inscribed with the name “Manios” that surfaced in 1887. For some years the inscription was considered to be the earliest Latin writing ever recorded, but years later was revealed to be a forgery (Muscarella 2000a: 11). An Italian scholar (Guarducci: 1994) further argued that the fibula itself is also a forgery.

How Forgeries Infiltrate Museums and Scholarship

Forgeries come to the market via antiquity dealers, most of whom sell forgeries. Although none processes excavated objects, they describe themselves as antiquity experts, inasmuch as they handle them every day, and know more about them than archaeologists. All declare they never sell forgeries. They readily supply false provenances for their merchandise, whether it is genuine or a forgery. Some provide a forged letter attesting to the object’s (whether genuine or a forgery) provenance, in an old Italian, Swiss or German family collection, or that it was acquired by a European collector in the 1930s, but again, this is a forgery of provenance grafted onto a genuine or a forged antiquity.

Some dealers work actively with forgers, commissioning their productions; a number have their own family-owned forgery factories (in Iran, Egypt, Italy, Mexico, South America, etc.). To enhance future sales they donate forgeries to museums (in the United States to non-prominent institutions with non-specialist staffs) and then cite the displayed gift to potential customers, establishing a *bona fide* for related forgeries they possess. To authenticate forgeries they possess, dealers and collectors employ a scientist/conservator or a willing scholar collaborator, while some museums use their own staff. In both cases some are totally unqualified or worse (Muscarella 2000a: 5, 24, 37–38, nos. 40, 41; 2012a; Kelkner and Bruhns 2010: 54–55), and their authentication reports become a major component of collectors’ purchasing decisions. Put bluntly and succinctly, scholars, museum and private conservationists/scientists avoid necessary tests, or lie, for example, to protect and avoid offending and losing rich customers or donors, which include rich museum trustees (Muscarella 2008a: 14–15; 2009: 400; 2012a). Dealers will also lie about a scholar’s alleged authentication: I have been cited as authenticating a forgery when I had merely stated, “this piece is interesting,” inasmuch as all forgeries are interesting.

Auction galleries are the major venues for the sale of genuine antiquities and forgeries (some sell more than others), and as with dealers, their salespeople claim to be authorities in their areas of specialization, bearing titles such as Expert or Director. A tactic of dealers is that when discovering a forgery in their possession they often pass it for sale to an auction gallery. In such sales they do not list their name, but provide a source as from “a private collection,” or “from a European collection,” etc.

The ultimate consumers of antiquities and forgeries are museums and collectors who become sources of information/misinformation provided to the public and scholars via their public exhibitions and publications, where it is authoritatively proffered that every object therein is of course genuine, which their labels document. The reality, however, is that *most* public, private and university museums in Europe, Japan, and the United States, have antiquity forgeries (called ancient “art” in their collections); in some (I know several in the United States), all or the majority of the antiquities displayed are forgeries.

Antiquity curators are not necessarily specialists, and some have only a BA academic degree. In museum staff-hiring policies an individual’s social background and wealth are more important than skill or knowledge, and some are ignorant of necessary connoisseurship scholarship. A primary component of a curator’s job description is to “build up” the museum’s collection by purchases and acquiring donations from rich collectors, and thereafter fully uphold the authenticity of their acquisitions, which action equally defends their reputations. For the same reasons some refuse to perform scientific tests on their acquisitions, or possibly expose donations from rich collectors and museum trustees to the same; and they often keep recognized forgeries on exhibition (Muscarella 2000a: 2–5; 2008; Kelkner and Bruhns 2010: 12). Rarely, a curator will notify his director that there is a forgery in his collection, only to be ordered to keep it on view (for example, in Cleveland, see below). Blatant deception in the guise of loyalty to a director, trustee, benefactor, or lender is a museum job description in all curatorial areas.

Curators will accept loans of collections from collectors and other museums, knowing they contain forgeries. The rationale here is that this is a good-faith business arrangement undertaken to protect the lenders’ reputations, and to avoid terminations of future loans, donations, and exhibitions. Sometimes donations of recognized forgeries acquired from estate settlements are not exhibited, but kept in storage, collaboration in the tax deductions claimed by the estate. Or donated forgeries from rich collectors are exhibited (at least while the donor or lender is alive) and labeled as genuine ancient productions.

Museum directors may be skilled in one area of art, but from day one of their appointment, they transmogrify themselves into self-proclaimed art experts in all fields of art housed in *their* museums, where everything they procure by purchase or donation is genuine, superb (Muscarella 2000a: 24). Directors are responsible for controlling and accepting the purchase of all art and antiquities from all areas, and defend *à outrance* the authenticity of their objects possessed by their museum. One example: after consultation with a colleague, a curator at the Cleveland Museum of Art was removing a forgery from its case just as the museum director passed by and asked what he was doing. When the curator explained what was occurring, the director was furious and ordered him to place the forgery with its forged label back on display. He, its owner, *ipso facto* baptized the forgery as genuine and it continued to be exhibited (Muscarella 2000a: 2, 46–47, no. 1; 2009: 401).

Private collectors purchase antiquities to display their wealth and connected power to “own art.” They publicly communicate their personal desires, such as “I had to have it,” “he has a lust for antiquities,” “his collecting is passionate... miraculous... positive and creative.” A dealer proclaimed that if nations will not allow dealers to buy their antiquities, they will utilize “our own ways” (Muscarella 2000a: 12, 23, fn. 5; 2009). When collectors donate their possessions, both genuine and forgeries, to museums they take a tax deduction; and the museum administrations never notify the tax authorities of the latter’s forged tax evaluations.

Scholars have played a crucial role for the success of forgeries infiltrating into scholarly discourse, in most cases unwittingly and indirectly, but indeed, in some cases willingly (Muscarella 1980/1981; 2000a: 3–8, 22–26; 2009). A critical impediment in ancient art and artifact studies in universities is that the existence and extent of forgeries is rarely addressed as a component of antiquity and archaeological studies (Muscarella 2000a: 9–10; Kelkner and Bruhns 2010: 57). Until recently, most scholars received a Ph.D. in archaeology without hearing the word “forgery,” or heard it only as a casual footnote topic (Feder 2006 is a good exception).

For professional, social, and fund-seeking loyalties to museum colleagues a number of curators, archaeologists and scholars collaborate (often secretly) with rich and powerful collectors and dealers, evading the problem of plunder and collecting (Muscarella 2009: 401–404, fn. 38). Some scholars downgrade the importance of forgeries, claiming there are only a few, even asserting that it is not an important issue. Some write letters of authenticity for forgeries owned by collectors, or publish them. Other scholars condemn those who publicly mention forgeries, functioning as forgery enablers: for example, one private archaeology assembly decreed that “We do not exhibit our dirty laundry in public” (Muscarella 2000a: 6–7). And some scholars refuse to inform museum colleagues that they are exhibiting forgeries: one told me she knew of a forgery in a major museum, but would never say so publicly or in print: she was afraid she would be barred from recommendations and lecture invitations at that institution. A tenured cuneiformist from a major university refused to confirm my opinion about an inscription I thought was forged. He said he did not want to offend the object’s owner: a rich antiquities dealer and collector (Muscarella 1995: 451, fn. 4).

No individual scholar’s deeds in the discipline is more unsettling than those of Roman Ghirshman, a brilliant scholar and archaeologist, but one unceasingly and actively engaged over decades in supporting plunder by encouraging the selling of antiquities (he himself sold antiquities), and the publisher in books and journals of forgeries of Iranian antiquities, together with forged provenances, all submitted as genuine productions, which were then cited by scholars as such. Further, in his prominent book, a standard text in classrooms and scholarly publications for decades, *The Art of Ancient Iran* (Golden Press, New York, 1964), he published scores of unexcavated antiquities alongside forgeries housed by dealers, in “private collections,” and in named museums. He blatantly privileged unexcavated antiquities far more than excavated artifacts, countless numbers of which were manifestly available

to him; and he played an important role in the assembly and organization of the traveling exhibitions and their catalogues mentioned above (Muscarella 2000a: 8, 25–26, 28, 46–49, 205, fns. 7, 11). Further, outraged students informed me that their professor (an outstanding scholar, but corrupt) ordered her students not to discuss forgeries in a forthcoming lecture by Roman Ghirshman, whom the professor knew continuously published many forgeries as ancient (Muscarella 1977a: 164, fn. 42a; 2000a: 4).

Ghirshman's activities are a model of the problem of scholarly engagement in publishing forgeries, but he was not an isolated example. Numerous ancient art and archaeological publications have made public many hundreds of forgeries discussed as ancient antiquities, numerous furnished with a named site, sometimes being misled, manipulated to function as a laundering and advertising service for forgeries and their vendors. Such was the case with the *Illustrated London News*, at one time a major and respected publisher of archaeological excavation reports, but one also exploited by archaeologists (below) and self-proclaimed archaeologists, such as A.U. Pope (Muscarella 1999: 9–10; 2000a: 8, 25, 126, no. 11, 204, 209–211, figs. 36, 38), who published there both genuine plundered and forged antiquities with identified sites and areas. The *ILN* also published forgeries derived from dealers, claiming they had recently been excavated, sometimes naming a specific site, and they published forgeries supplied with false proveniences that were in dealers' possessions or had already been purchased (Muscarella 2000a: 8, 24).

The plunder and forgery culture are joined, both inhabited by a nexus of a powerful family, well populated by citizens of different academic and social backgrounds. They comprise incestuous alliances of museum personnel, its directors, curators and trustees, mutually collectors, dealers, auction house staff, and scholars. Many are wealthy; all are powerful. Its activities warrant continuous discussion, all the more so because some scholars and students remain ignorant of their activities (Muscarella 2007: 603, 608–609, 611, 613).

How Forgeries Harm Legitimate Scholarship

A different but concomitant category of forgery, one that parallels the forgery of antiquities, remains to be discussed in more detail. As already reported above, it has created havoc in the discipline, one that distorts and obviates an accurate interpretation of the loci of artifact distribution of cultural material in antiquity. This is the forgery of proveniences/provenances, where antiquities, both genuine and forgeries, are claimed to have been “found” at a specific named site provided by dealers and curators, which unanchored assertion is then incorporated into scholarly discourse regarding artifact distributions and a polity's trade patterns and foreign interactions. In the genuine assemblage the proveniences are not known either to antiquities dealers or scholars, but who nevertheless sophisticatedly submit the proffered site as

verified; in the forgery category they have background other than a forger's, then a dealer's, shop provenance (Muscarella 2000a: 13–17).

Some examples demonstrate the range and implications of such forgeries. For many years hundreds of plundered genuine Mesopotamian antiquities, but with no archaeologically known proveniences, have been sold in dealer's shops in Iran and elsewhere, as deriving from western Iran. Subsequently they were published in scholarly publications as found, and treated as if excavated, in that region. Each of these antiquities was bestowed with fabricated historical conclusions about Mesopotamian conquests and cultural exchange patterns between Mesopotamia and Iran over several millennia (Muscarella 1988: 120, fn. 6; 2000a: 13–15, 81–82). Ignored here is that it was legally easier to sell plundered Iraqi antiquities in Iran, hence they were smuggled there for prompt sale.

In the Van Museum in northeastern Turkey there is a collection of Iranian Luristan bronzes (also a forgery of an Assyrian relief), confiscated from smugglers from Iran. Had the bronzes not been confiscated but reached Turkish dealers, they would have been sold and accepted as Luristan antiquities uncovered in Turkey. A large collection of unexcavated (purchased? confiscated?) Luristan swords and pins in the Adana Regional Museum was proclaimed by the museum's director to have derived from Urartian tombs near Van (Taşyürek 1980: 212). And an archaeologist in Armenia (Piloposyan 1996: 124, 127) blithely informs us of eighth-seventh century Urartian material "reportedly found" (by whom?) at many sites in Syria and Mesopotamia, including Tell Leilan in Syria, which is a third millennium BCE site. I have also seen for sale in an antique shop in Van a classical Hasanlu lion pin. When asked about its source the dealer named a site north of Lake Van, when in fact it had surely been smuggled from Iran, probably stolen by a workman at Hasanlu. The extent of thefts by site workmen may not be common, although some have been reported by archaeologists; for example, workmen at Troy stole a large quantity of objects from the site, the so-called Treasure C, much of which was subsequently recovered.

Urartian antiquities were published by Ghirshman as having been discovered "fortuitement [!] par les paysans" south of the Caspian Sea, hundreds of miles distant from Urartu, thus demonstrating what no excavation had hitherto accomplished, how far east of their homeland the Urartians had traversed. All the antiquities presented were a fabrication, a forgery of a provenance (Muscarella 2000a: 214, fn. 56).

A number of bronze vessels asserted to have come from Luristan have two facing animal figures that had been added by dealers to their sides as handles; all elements here are ancient, but the forged result is a modern pastiche. And this composition has been cited by some scholars as the historical cultural background of the later Achaemenian handled vessels (Muscarella 2000a: 97, 99–100 406–409).

A silver vessel decorated in several horizontal zones with a complex Assyrian royal scene was claimed by a scholar to have derived from western Iran, thus demonstrating that an Assyrian army had penetrated and conquered the area in the 7th century BCE. The plundered (from where?) vessel itself is genuine, plundered, but

originally undecorated, and the representations recently added, creating a painstakingly made pastiche, but one bearing many misunderstandings and errors. The forger's employer knew that an unadorned plain vessel could not fetch as much money as a decorated one, and added new elements to an old object, a not uncommon activity (Muscarella 2000b; Kelkner and Bruhns 2010: 19). Equally, a genuine plundered, unadorned Urartian helmet was newly decorated also with a complex Assyrian scene, another pastiche to prove foreign contacts (Muscarella 2000a: 149–150, no. 17) (Fig. 9).

The so-called “Memphis Stele” (*Totenstele*) (Fig. 10) appeared in 1930 through its owner, an archaeologist and antiquities dealer, and was claimed by him to have been discovered in Egypt. Shown in relief are apparently mourning Achaemenian Persians officiating at a funeral ceremony, depicted in the Egyptian custom. Being unique, it was claimed by many scholars to be a rare occurrence of cross-cultural influences in Egypt, a foreigner accorded an Egyptian burial ceremony. And although correctly recognized in print as strange and coarsely executed, it was purchased by Berlin Museum curators from the archaeologist-dealer. Indeed, it has no parallels, and if genuine would have been stylistically correctly executed, unlike this stele, another crude forgery with a forged provenience (Muscarella 2003a).

An unexcavated terracotta nude male clay figurine claimed as from Marlik, bearing a circumcised penis, was shown to me by a dealer who joyously argued that his antiquity documented that Jews were present in the south Caspian Region in the second millennium BCE. Not one excavated figurine from any area of Iran is circumcised.

Another component of forgery productions involves archaeologists themselves: the disquieting conduct of archaeologists who allege to have excavated artifacts derived from their sites, when in fact they themselves had forged and insinuated them into their published reports as excavated within their sites. Such deliberate falsifications were undertaken to verify preconceived ideological beliefs. Collectively, they are forgeries of an archaeological site's cultural history and its historical background. Examples of such activity occurred in several geographical areas known to me, the United States, Japan, and Turkey. As for the United States, it involved charges that an archaeologist planted artifacts in his American Indian site (Sandia Cave). This material included both ancient and freshly made arrowheads, perpetrated to allow him to claim, and thereby gain prestige, an earlier age for his site than actually existed (Preston 1995). As for Japan, this involves several archaeologists who salted forged artifacts at their sites for cultural-political reasons, to demonstrate (the same tactic as above) that Japanese had been in the country far longer than hitherto recognized (French 2000; Yamada 2002; Feder 2006: 44–46).

For Turkey, there are several occurrences, all associated with one archaeologist, the brilliant and truly charismatic James Mellaart, whose actions are claimed to have also been accomplished to achieve fame and adulation in the discipline. In 1959 he published a report with eighteen drawings, but no photographs, of sumptuous



Figure 9: Iranian vessel with added scene. Muscarella 2000b.



Figure 10: The "Memphis" stela. Muscarella 2003a.

finds: figurines, weapons, jewelry, remains of decorated woven rug, and an Egyptian inscription on gold plaques. Mellaart claimed they were the contents of two tombs, dated by the inscription to the second millennium BCE, which he asserted had been recovered at Dorak in northwestern Turkey "some years ago." No information was offered concerning the source of the discovery, but in later publications he supplied tomb plans with the finds *in situ*, claiming they derived from a secret discovery in the 1920s, and that photos were shown to him recently in a private home in Izmir. The "Treasure of Dorak" was posited by Mellaart to be a major archaeological discovery. For decades the drawings were studied and evaluated, and vigorously challenged. Not a single object has yet to be seen and many scholars believe that the "Dorak" material was an extraordinary, but enigmatic (in human

and professional terms) fraud executed by Mellaart (Muscarella 1988: 397–98, fn. 5; 2000a: 141).

Further confounding the personal issue, Mellaart published wall paintings he claimed had been excavated and reconstructed by him at his Anatolian site, Çatal Hüyük, and hitherto unpublished (Mellaart 1990: 27, 32–46). Conversely, all his Çatal Hüyük colleagues denounced them as never having existed at the site, that they were his creations. Further, in the same publication (Mellaart 1990: 28–29) he offered drawings of a cluster of pebble female figurines along with pebbles incised with deities, children, ships, animals, and houses, which he incongruously dated to ca. 12,500 BCE. He claimed they had been “collected” (unrevealed by whom) on the seashore at Beldibi southwest of Antalya in Turkey, but no one has ever seen them to verify his drawings (nor determine who made them – Muscarella 2000a: 141–43; 212, fn. 52; for other decorated pebble forgeries see Jones 1999: 92–93). The salted and modernly created Piltdown Man is another matter, inasmuch as one does not know if it was the excavator or an outsider who secretly buried the modern formed composite skull in the soil (Jones 1999: 93–95; Feder 2006: 64–91).

An example of the alteration/forging of the locus of objects within excavated sites is best documented by Arthur Evans, indeed a remarkable archaeologist. But he falsified the actual level in which Linear B tablets, written in an earlier form of Greek, first occurred at Knossos, publishing them as deriving from a level earlier than where they had actually been retrieved, and which was accurately recorded in his field log book: the deceit proclaimed to prove his rigid belief that Linear B writing was employed in Crete earlier than in Greece. Evans also published altered photographs (a minimum of 16), over-painting them to falsify actual find-spots, which would have revealed the true chronological situation. All this was egocentrically undertaken to suit preconceived interpretations of Cretan Minoan power over the mainland Greek Myceneans (German 2005: 210–11, 218–25, 228–29).

A scholar researching an Iranian site’s stratigraphy reviewed its excavator’s published section drawing of the various levels of occupation used to document the chronological sequence argued by the excavator. When the scholar examined the original section drawing he discovered that the nature of two vessels drawn in the published section had been crucially altered before its publication. The excavator was attempting to prove a chronological conclusion he had incorrectly proclaimed, and would not correct.

The history of forgeries of Ancient Near Eastern artifacts is a multi-layered matter that involves and engages us, scholars and laypersons, contextually with modern-made antiquities, with purported geographical and site provenances, and with the falsification/forgery by archaeologists of data from their own excavations.

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Constance von Rden

Beyond the East-West Dichotomy in Syrian and Levantine Wall Paintings

Abstract: The discovery of new “Aegean style” fresco paintings in Syria and the Levant during the last 25 years has caused a sensation in the archaeology of the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. Their technical and iconographic similarities to the wall paintings from Crete and the Aegean have overwhelmed the scientific community as well as the public media, and renewed the discussion about East-West relations during the second millennium BCE. Up to now the discussion of these contacts has been restricted mainly to the production of the paintings. Especially their execution *al fresco* has mostly been declared as a “Minoan” technique and, therefore, as a western invention. The motivation for many investigations seems to be the attempt to identify “Minoan” craftspeople and influences, and to see the murals, therefore, as a western product. Their local consumption and perception and thus the role they play within the material culture of western Asia have largely been neglected. By emphasizing the “western” origin of production techniques and iconographic aspects, the discourse became largely dominated by an East-West-polarity, dividing Syrian and Levantine wall paintings into a western and an eastern group, the latter being the antithetical pole of the former. This chapter examines the reasons for this fascination within the scholarly community and critiques the tendency to cement an East-West dichotomy in the production of knowledge. Furthermore, it seeks to open alternative perspectives on aspects beyond these well-known modernist categorizations, by considering the social consumption of these paintings.

Keywords: wall paintings, Orientalism, ethnicity, Qatna, Alalakh, Tall Sakka, Tall Burak, Tel Kabri, fresco technique, thalassocracy, ex oriente lux, movement

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Introduction

Since the late 1980s wall paintings have been brought to light at several eastern Mediterranean sites: at Tel Kabri (Niemeier 2002; Cline *et al.* 2011) in the central Levant, at Tell el Dab^a in the Eastern Nile delta (Bietak *et al.* 2007), at Tell Sakka (Taraqqi 1999), Ebla (Bietak 2007: 280–82) and Qatna in western Syria (von Rden 2011 and in press, a) as well as at Tall Burak on the Lebanese coast (Kamlah and Sader

2010). The reasons for the excitement in the archaeological community were not only their appealing iconography and their mostly prestigious architectural setting within palaces, but also their perceived influences from other regions in the eastern Mediterranean, an aspect which produced an expectation of better understanding long-distance craft interaction and interregional relations in general. Despite the immense complexity of the topic, clear, unambiguous attributions have been recognized, attributing the paintings either to an Aegean or an Eastern tradition. As such they have been categorized according to their manner of execution and closely linked to a possible identification of migrating craftspeople (see for example Niemeier and Niemeier 1998, 2000, 2002; Bietak *et al.* 2007; Taraqji 2008; Pfälzner 2008), while research questions considering their architectural setting, their spatial arrangement or local consumption have often been neglected (exceptions are Feldman 2007; von Rügen, *in press*, b). But why is there such a strict focus on the question of origin and a desire for unambiguous attribution to a certain material culture, as if the latter has to be understood as a static, closed formation? Additionally, these acts of attribution are in some cases accompanied by a quite unreflective use of pseudo-ethnic terms, often leading to an implicit ethnic attribution to a material culture or specific practice (S. Sherrat 1994: 237). Such terms were still in use up to the 1990s and even beyond, while the awareness of their problems was already common sense in the broader archaeological research. The question arises if and how both phenomena – the unambiguous attribution and the use of pseudo-ethnic terms – are interrelated within this field of research.

The attribution of an Eastern or Western tradition to murals of the Levant and today's Syria is not a new phenomenon: discussion regarding their relation to the "Minoan world" started long before the late 1980s, with the discoveries of André Parrot in Mari and Leonard Woolley in Alalakh. These findings of the first half of the twentieth century CE can be regarded as the initial point for the debate of an East-West inter-relation concerning that group of material. In order to examine possible reasons behind this fascination, a critical approach to the history of research and the production of knowledge constitutes the primary focus of the present paper, starting from the very first discoveries in the 1930s. Its aim is not to deconstruct mutual influences in contemporary Aegean and western Asia wall paintings; they doubtless existed and played an important role. But within the context of this paper, I want to trace possible historical, social and personal biases behind our interpretations, in order to gain a better understanding of the reason why we approached this phenomenon nearly exclusively within the narrow focus on their origins, mostly resulting in unambiguous attributions of them as either "Minoan" or western Asian products.

Minoan-mania – “Ex Oriente Lux” and “European Modernity”

The excavation in Mari started in 1933, while the French authorities controlled Syria, under the direction of André Parrot. He published some preliminary results in an article in 1937, including the then recently found wall paintings. Already on the very first page he opens the discussion whether they should be considered as “Eastern” or if they are “inspirées du réalisme et de l’élégance de la civilisation crétoise, ou bien, au contraire, cette dernière n’aurait-elle pas hérité quelqu’un des concepts mésopotamiens?” (Parrot 1937: 325). Obviously Arthur Evans’ discoveries in Knossos seem to have cast such an immense shadow over the scientific community that even the discussion of wall paintings excavated on the banks of the Euphrates, far away from the Mediterranean, could not exist without Crete taking a major role. This is even more surprising, if we consider the very few aspects Parrot saw as indicating a possible link to the Aegean. While he saw the paintings in general as deeply influenced by the “Sumerians” with an addition of “spontaneity” by the “temperament” of the “Semites of Mari,” he described the spirals framing a pedestal in room 64 and the Investiture scene in court 106 (Fig. 1) as executed as perfectly as those found in the Aegean (Parrot 1937: 353–54). The attention he devoted to this very small, even marginal detail is surprising, considering the impressive corpus of wall paintings with very interesting, astonishing, and well-preserved representations of offering processions or the famous Investiture Scene. Parrot maintained this preference of a “Minoan” link in his final publication of 1958. In most of the book he conducted a quite positivist description of the find spots and paintings, wherein Crete and Knossos play nearly no role. But the introduction and conclusion are mostly dedicated to a possible relation between Knossos and Mari (Parrot 1958b: viii). For support, he drew on his interpretation of the so-called Kaptor-objects of the Mari tablets as imports and, therefore, as clear evidence for a commercial relationship with Crete. For the similarities in the spiral-decoration he hypothesized a possible meeting of specialists of different regions, adding wisely that such meetings never result in exclusively one-way influences (Parrot 1937: 354).¹ Finally he declared the investigation of relations with Crete as one of the most important questions (Parrot 1958b: 109–10) – a somewhat surprising conclusion for such a corpus of paintings that provides diverse insights into local ritual and royal ideology (Moortgat 1959: 1964).

But other archaeologists working in other places in Syria at around the same time reached similar conclusions. Woolley’s good relations with the French inspector M. Brosse, whom he knew from his days at Carchemish (Winstone 1990: 202), facilitated

¹ “Et quand des spécialistes de mentalité et de formation différentes, se rencontrent, il est impossible que les uns apportent tout et les autres rien.” (Parrot 1937: 354).

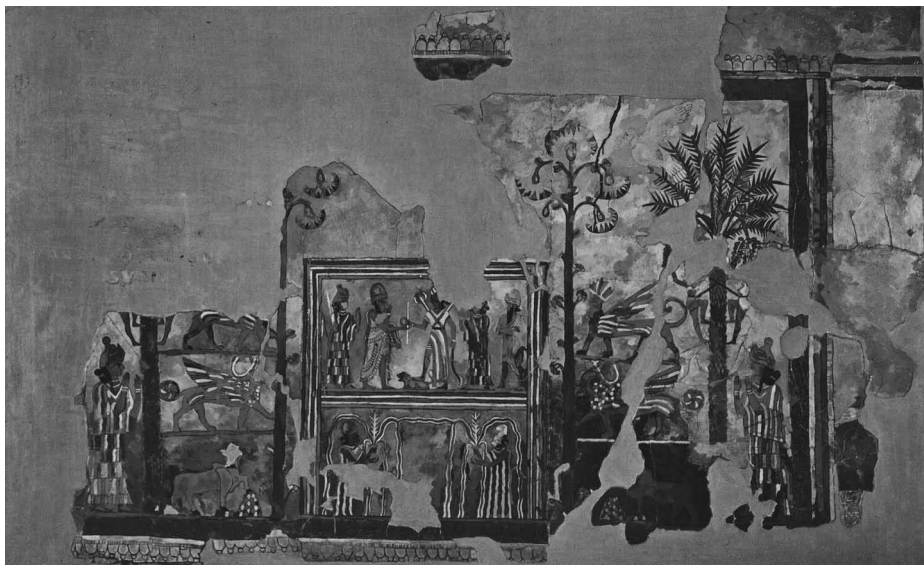


Figure 1: The Investiture Scene, Court 106, Mari. Parrot 1958a: pl. A.

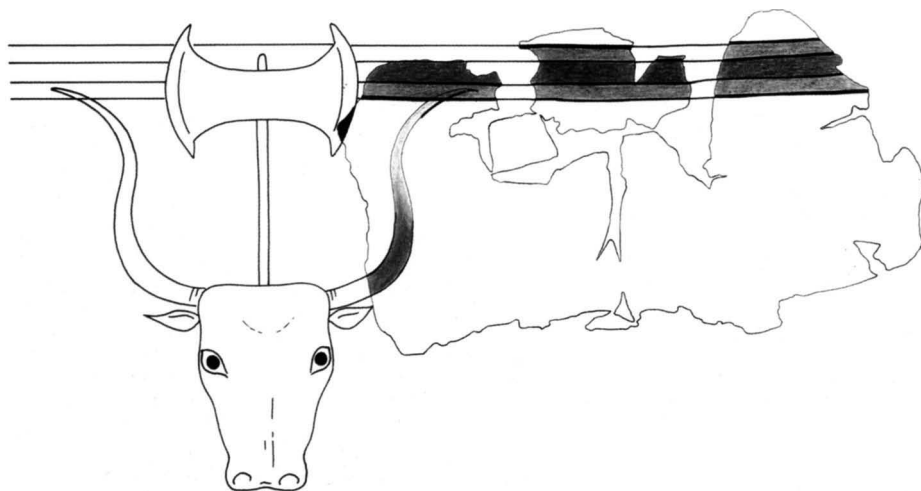


Figure 2: Bull's horn with bichrome sequence of three ribbons in the reconstruction of Niemeier and Niemeier. Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: fig. 15.

his excavations shortly afterwards in the Hatay area of the northern Levant. At Alalakh he excavated small fragments of colored wall plaster as deep as level IX – for him, evidence for the early use of fresco painting in the Levant, a technique that was then known only from the Bronze Age Aegean (Woolley 1955: 228). He excavated more significant fragments in the palace of level VII and immediately linked their



Figure 3: Depiction of grass in movement. Woolley 1955: pl. XXXVIIIa.

iconography to the frescoes Evans had excavated earlier in Knossos. In a lecture in 1942, he enthusiastically emphasized the “astonishing resemblance” in the architectural construction as well as in the painting’s technique and iconography between the palaces of Alalakh and Knossos (Woolley 1942: 11).

Most of the murals had been excavated in a relatively high layer of the small rooms 11–13, probably fallen from the upper storey. The fragments from room 12 and 13 belong together, and several of their features were considered by Woolley as linked to “Minoan” iconography (Woolley 1955: 94): a wavy line he saw as a parallel to the Cretan wavy line motif, groups of three bowed lines as stalks of blossoms, and most importantly he recognized twigs and leaves in darker-green on a pale greenish grey, whose execution he compared with the *Sacred Grove Fresco* from Knossos (Woolley 1955: 230; Evans 1930: 67, pl. XVIII). Altogether he proposed an interpretation of these fragments as a tree trunk and leaves (Woolley 1955: 231), an idea that was later

visualized by W. Smith (1965: Fig. 137). Further fragments with a yellow horizontal band framed by two blue ones and a bull's horn were found in the passage between room 11 and 12 (Fig. 2 in a reconstruction by the Niemeiers). In this case his opinion is less clear: On the one hand he saw herein the counterpart of one of the favorite motifs of the "Minoan" painters (Woolley 1942: 11), but also a possible connection to scenes with sacrificial bulls in the murals of Mari (Woolley 1955: 231). In room 13 and outside of the southwestern wall of the palace, fragments of bowed, creamy white grasses were found (Woolley 1955: 94). He characterized their execution as impressionistic and "unmistakably in the spirit of Cretan art" (Woolley 1955: 231) (Fig. 3). He paid less attention to paintings depicting architectural elements in room 5 and in a later house of Alalakh IV (Fig. 4), both very similar in their representation of orthostats and wooden beams. He characterized them briefly as reflecting the local architecture, a tradition that obviously was alive for around 200 years (Woolley 1955: 231). One might assume that their local character might have been the reason why they were of less interest to him.

Let us consider what kind of links Woolley wanted to establish with the Aegean. The fresco technique is probably the most prominent characteristic Woolley exposed for the assumed connections between the Aegean and the Levant, whereas his iconographic arguments seem more vague. He was very much convinced that the motif of tree's foliage indicated stylistic relations with Minoan paintings, but this reconstruction has been convincingly revised by Barbara and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier, who propose for the same fragments a griffin (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 84) (Fig. 5). For the bull's horn mentioned above (Fig. 2), Woolley was wise enough not to link it exclusively to "Minoan" iconography. While he considered the "movement" of the bundle of creamy white grass as a relevant characteristic for a link to Crete (Fig. 3), he did not refer to an exact parallel. Judging by some of his discussion points, especially with regard to the motif of the tree, one gets the impression that he was perhaps led by his wish to identify links to Crete; a suspicion that is substantiated by the study of his descriptions of architecture. Of the non-preserved upper-floor of the palace, only a few architectonic elements were detected in the debris, but it seems that he wanted to produce an association with "Minoan" architecture. Like Evans he used the appellation "piano nobile" for the upper storey (Woolley 1946: 186; 1955: 94), and he incorporated the few archaeological remains into a "Minoanized" fantasy about the detailed layout of this "piano nobile":

the piano nobile, lit by a window with a stone frame and a central column like those on the mosaics of Knossos. The room itself, like other rooms in the palace, was divided into two parts by a pair of columns set between two wall pilasters and standing on a low threshold – a typically Cretan design. Its walls were decorated with frescoes which, in their peculiar technique, reproduced the "miniature" frescoes of the Cretan palace (Woolley 1946: 186).

One wonders how he was so clear about the partition of space and other aspects, but his choice of words alone betrays a desire to produce a clear association of his

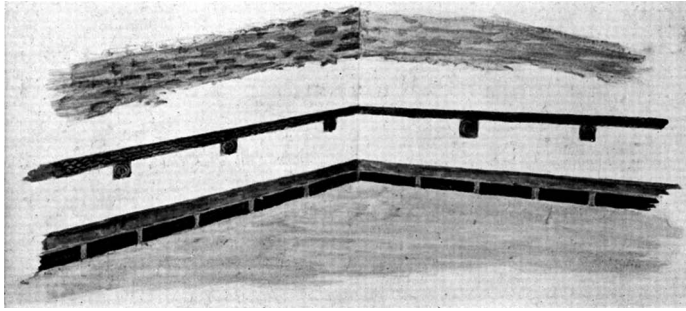


Figure 4: Depiction of architectural elements, house 39/A, Alalakh IV. Woolley 1955: pl. XXXIX.

findings with Evans's palace. But Woolley did not consider them as influences from Crete. On the contrary, following the chronological framework used at the time (S. Smith 1940), he considered the paintings from Alalakh as at least a century older than those discovered by Evans and had therefore little doubt that Crete "owes the best of its architecture, and its frescoes, to the Asiatic mainland" (Woolley 1953: 11, 12, 74). He even emphasized that Alalakh VII is "affiliated only to the East" and "of western cultural influences we find at Alalakh no trace at all." As a possible medium of transfer for these characteristics, and especially the complex fresco-technique, he proposed itinerant craftsmen, who were invited to travel overseas from Asia to build and decorate the palaces of the Cretan ruler (Woolley 1953: 74–75). Both Parrot and Woolley emphasized disproportionally the mural's links to "Minoan" Crete. But in contrast to prevalent ideas in the late twentieth century CE, Woolley considered it as an influence from the East to the West by means of travelling craftsmen. But why was the relation to Crete so exceptionally important to them and their research in western Asia? In Woolley's attempt to explain the similarities in the architecture of both regions what clearly shines through is Evans' thesis of "migrating Asiatic people" (Evans 1928: 269). Woolley considered Crete as "... not yet so culturally developed as to influence to any appreciable extent the older and more advanced civilisation of the mainland, North Syria was helping to build up in Crete that remarkable Minoan civilisation ..." (Woolley 1942: 12), an attitude that can be also detected in his agenda to excavate in the Hatay. In a lecture in 1942 he stated: "In the Hatay I selected two sites [Al Mina and Alalakh] as being more likely than others to yield evidence of intercourse between East and West" (Woolley 1942: 9).² Clearly Woolley did not study the Hatay out of an explicit interest for the region itself; rather he wanted "to

² This is mirrored as well in the titles of his earlier lectures like "North Syria as a Cultural Link in the Ancient World" or "Syria as the Gateway between East and West."

contribute to our knowledge of civilization's progress" (Woolley 1953: 13, 14) and "to throw light on the origin and development of Cretan art" (Woolley 1953).³

His approach aligned well with the then-current zeitgeist in British archaeology, perhaps best represented by Gordon Childe, whom Woolley knew from his excavation in Ur. Childe himself was a student of Evans and very much influenced by his ideas (A. Sherratt 2006),⁴ and all three scholars were part of the same circle, regularly meeting at Evans' house in Youlbury, near Oxford (Green 1981: 61) – a circumstance that can surely be linked to their converging approaches. In the first edition of Childe's well-known book, *The Dawn of European Civilization*, published in 1925, he described the civilization in Europe not as

the result of miraculous birth, but the result of the diffusion and adaption of the discoveries of the Orient [...] In the process of diffusion and creation the isle of Crete played a foremost role. Its geographical position enabled the Cretans to take advantage of advances made in the South and East without becoming dependent either on Egypt or on Sumer (Childe 1925: 24).

Childe seemed to have a clear position about the direction of influences, considered by him positively as "advances," and it is obviously this image Woolley wanted to prove by his work in the Hatay – the architecture and the frescoes of the palace were a convenient tool to do so. But within Childe's quite clear position ambivalence can be traced. Obviously he felt the strong need to add that Crete was independent and outstanding, so a few pages later he explained:

We have seen that Minoan civilization was deeply indebted both to Egypt and Mesopotamia. Now I must insist that it was no mere copy of either, but an original and creative force. As such Crete stands out as essentially modern in outlook. The Minoan spirit was thoroughly European and in no sense oriental. A comparison with Egypt and Mesopotamia will make the contrast plain. We find in Crete none of those stupendous palaces that betoken the autocratic power of the oriental despot. Nor do gigantic temples and extravagant tombs like the pyramids reveal an excessive preoccupation with ghostly things. The consequences of this distinction are reflected in Minoan art. The Cretan artist was not limited to perpetuating the cruel deeds of a selfish despot nor doomed to formalism by the innate conservatism of priestly superstition. Hence the modern naturalism, the truly occidental feeling for life and nature that distinguish Minoan vase painting, frescoes and intaglios. Beholding these charming scenes of games and processions, animal and fishes, flowers and trees we breathe already a European atmosphere (Childe 1925: 29)⁵

³ In an earlier article, he refers to the nearly revolutionary development of Cretan "art" between 2000 and 1800 which he saw not only as due to a "local genius" but also to new influences from foreign countries, and he proposed that "free trade" through the northern Syrian ports was one of the formative influences of Cretan art (Woolley 1946: 186–87).

⁴ Childe's concept is also not without forerunners, but owes many aspects to his teacher Evans, who formulated the idea of "civilizing influences" on Crete already in his first volume of the "Palace of Minos" in 1921 (Evans 1921), adding also that at this stage the "Minoan culture... had reached already a comparatively advanced stage" (Evans 1921: 16).

⁵ For the discussion of these passages see also A. Sherratt 2006.

His differentiation between “European,” “modern” Crete and the “despotic” Orient preoccupied “with ghostly things” is an excellent example of what Edward Said (1978) describes as Orientalism. In its combination of “irrationality” and preference for “despots” he produced an image of the East which was and is up to now well-known in Western literature, art and research, producing the “Other” of the so called “Western World.” Thus, despite his admiration for Eastern advances, he emphasized Crete’s greatness – an ambivalence well known in different renderings of Orientalism. Childe was able to incorporate in his diffusionist concept of “ex oriente lux” a Western superiority, embodied by the “European Minoans,” who were able to have a “rational” high civilization without a despot. He saw art and fresco paintings as markers for Crete’s “modern naturalism, the truly occidental feeling for life” (Childe 1925: 29); Minoan frescoes became a symbol of “European modernity.” From the very beginning of research on relations between western Asia and the Aegean up to the present day these ideas weigh heavily on most of the studies, including the narratives about the wall paintings in western Asia. But it seems that these ideas were not the only ones. Some other conceptions, such as the notion of a “Minoan thalassocracy,” were crucial in this regard. It is to those that I turn next.

Fantasies about a Minoan Thalassocracy

During World War I, Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot agreement with the aim of controlling the political future of western Asia after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. While officially the British still promised autonomy for all the regions “freed” by the Arab insurgence, this secret agreement of the European powers included the plan to divide western Asia into a French and a British sphere of influence. Both powers guaranteed its respective collaborator equal economic rights within their controlled regions, including the use of important harbors like Haifa or Alexandretta. Easy access to harbors, trade routes and markets was obviously the main aim of the undertaking.

Long before this dubious arrangement was approved by the League of Nations in 1922, French troops controlled parts of the region, and archaeological research went hand in hand with the military activities. In the introduction to a lecture in 1942, during World War II, the prominent French archaeologist Claude F.A. Schaeffer shed some light on the then prevalent ideas held by archaeologists working in the Middle East. His own excavations in Ugarit were set in the tradition of Bonaparte’s expedition to Egypt and Ernest Renan’s expedition in 1860, when France disembarked their troops on the Syrian coast in order to “uphold the Christian Arabs” (Schaeffer 1942: 185). He described the start of his excavation with the glorious words: “About twenty years ago, in 1919, when the victorious Allies had entrusted the Mandate of Syria to France, my country, though bled white on the battlefields, did not hesitate immediately to resume its scientific work in the East.” Research and military activities were clearly not separate acts during this period; rather, they were closely inter-linked, and to assume

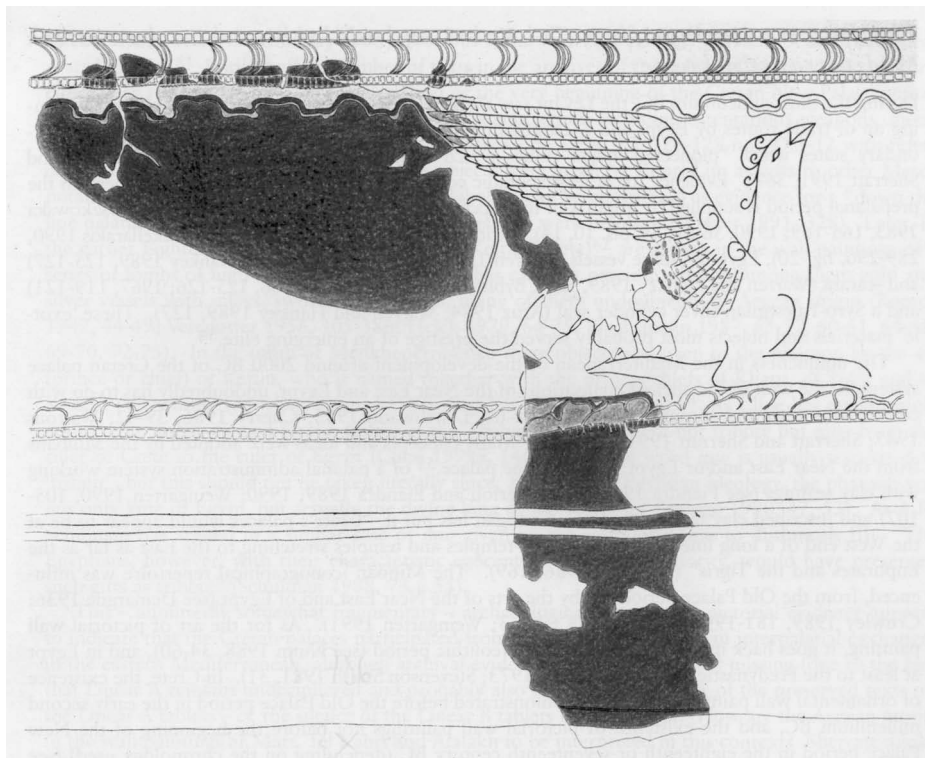


Figure 5: Reconstruction of the notched-plume motif at Alalakh as a griffon.
Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: fig. 22.

mutual influences in terms of ideology is certainly not far-fetched. Moreover, one of the main aims of the British and French was control of the sea-trade, harbors and markets. The “Minoans” as an early “European” naval empire can be easily seen as a reflection of British naval expansion in the Mediterranean (Starr 1955: 291; Hamilakis 2002: 3). Even for the French archaeologist Schaeffer it must have been easy to identify with that construct; after all, he joined the German navy in World War I, the French in World War II, and he entered the British Royal Navy in 1940, before becoming a member of the Free French in 1941 (Vercoutter 1989: 185).

This ideological closeness between archaeology and military activity might be a reason why, in spite of the scarce evidence in the early years of research, a dominance in trade and a supremacy of the sea, even as far as the Levantine coast, was attributed to the “Minoans.”⁶ Like his teacher Evans, Childe also emphasized the Cretan initia-

⁶ Based on references to a thalassocracy in classical texts, see for example Herodotus III 122; Thucydides 1, 4.1.

tive in trade (Evans 1928: 571, 626, 757; A. Sherratt 2006: 115),⁷ and even Woolley saw the Aegean potsherds excavated at Ugarit as “concrete evidence of a possible eastward expansion of Minoan culture to the mainland of Asia” (Woolley 1942: 10).⁸ In a very similar way Schaeffer described the position of Ugarit as if the site “could not fail to attract the attention of the Cretans, who, as you know, then controlled the sea trade of the Eastern Mediterranean” (Schaeffer 1942: 189). Woolley even led this Minoan naval supremacy back to the mentality of the “Minoan” seaman, who “had none of that fear of the open sea which kept the Phoenician hugging a friendly coast” (Woolley 1946: 187). Onto the scarce evidence were displaced not only the image of a “Minoan thalassocracy,” but also the dichotomy of the passive fearsome inhabitants of Ugarit waiting for the active, fearless “Minoans”, the overlords of the sea. Again a dichotomy which evokes Said’s discourse of Orientalism and the often passive role ascribed to the “Oriental.”

The ambivalence about the receptive role of the “European Minoans” to the concept of “*ex oriente lux*” might have led not only to Childe’s overreaching discourse about their independence and modernity, but also to a promotion of an active and powerful “Minoan thalassocracy.” The different concepts seem to us inconsistent and only hardly compatible, but during this period these two spheres, the economic and the cultural, were easy to separate.

This article is not the place to discuss in detail the construct of a “Minoan thalassocracy” (see, for example, Starr 1955; Knapp 1993), but one cannot underestimate its role as a topos in research. It had an immense impact on studies dealing with interrelations in the Eastern Mediterranean in general, and in the second half of the twentieth century CE it gained more and more influence on research – the carefully separated spheres of economy and culture of the former years seemed to blur. Already in 1947 Kantor saw the roughly synchronous introduction of the spiral motif into Egypt and western Asia as a sign of the expansion of Cretan trade (Kantor 1947: 18, 31, 32). Due to her strong belief in a Minoan thalassocracy, she considered these motifs clearly as an influence from West to East (the direction of influence was later adopted for Alalakh by W. Smith 1965: 104). The popularity of the topos of a “Minoan thalassocracy” increased from the 1980s on (see for example Hägg and Marinatos 1984). The topic might have been promoted by contemporary discussions about globalization and the concomitant positive connotation of trade and connections as a motor for spreading “advances,” “progress” and “culture.” Within this frame of thinking the “Minoan trader” gained another status as a cultural transmitter, who was powerful enough to have a real impact on the “more advanced civilizations” of the East. The embarrassment of the “*ex oriente lux*” was finally confronted. The “Minoan”

⁷ Pointed out by A. Sherratt 2006: 115.

⁸ The assumption of a Minoan thalassocracy was often simply assumed or supported by much later findings of Late Helladic pottery, nonetheless attributed to the Minoans or even a Minoan colony (Woolley 1946: 187).

sea empire could be considered as an agent for inverse influences, including the identification of “Minoan” craftspeople in the Near East (for example Niemeier 1995: 260).

The New Era – Same Same but Different⁹

The discoveries at Tel Kabri in the late 1980s were the starting signal for a renewal of the discussion about wall paintings in western Asia, following findings at Tell el Dabʿa in the Eastern Nile Delta as well as at Qatna, Ebla, Tall Sakka and Tall Burak in western Syria and the Lebanese coast. But surprisingly enough, the approaches and topoi of the first half of the century were in many respects maintained; this is particularly true for the corpus of wall paintings in “Aegean Style.” Again, research has been often driven by a nearly exclusive interest in the “Minoans,” with the difference that, instead of searching for their origin in the East, focus has been placed on their expansion and impact in the East. The local societies and their acquaintance with the paintings have been only rarely discussed, leading Susan Sherratt to warn, in 1994, of the danger of an Aegeo-centric view (S. Sherratt 1994), a fear which is entirely legitimate.

The most prominent rhetorical scheme, maintained since Parrot first mentioned it as a possibility in 1937, is the assumption that the similarities in the murals in western Asia and Crete are due to itinerant craftspeople. It reemerged already in the very first preliminary report about the findings at Tel Kabri (Kempinski and Niemeier 1989), but with the slight difference that Kempinski and Niemeier argue for Cretan craftspeople travelling to western Asia. They have completely abandoned Woolley’s and Childe’s concept that “advances” were brought from the East to West. The reconsideration of the chronology, but also the prominent discussion of a Minoan thalassocracy and its possible role as cultural agent, might have paved the way for such an inversion of argumentation. Certainly the critique of this one-sided concept was long overdue, but arguing for the exact opposite perhaps goes too far. By considering the paintings as having “a purely Minoan iconography as well as technique”¹⁰ and therefore as a “Minoan” product (Kempinski and Niemeier 1989: xx), they do not restrict themselves to the thesis that the technique and the iconography were brought to the Levant through an interaction of craftspeople; they rather emphasize explicitly that the small selection of murals passed down to us were indeed painted by “Minoans” themselves.

But in spite of the differences in their agenda – the Niemeiers’ interest in the cultural impact of the “Minoans” and Woolley’s wish “to throw light on the origin and

⁹ Taken from the film by Detlef Buck (2009).

¹⁰ The *buon fresco*-technique with string lines and the specific choice of colors; Kempinski and Niemeier assumed already in the preliminary report the use of Egyptian blue for the floor, but this needed to be revised the following year (Kempinski and Niemeier 1991: XVII).

development of Cretan art” – both sides follow the same path in their interpretation of the mode of transfer, resulting in a similar approach to the material. They intensively look for parallels in Crete, which bears the danger that other aspects might be neglected. But while Woolley’s thesis does not exclude similarities to the local material culture, Niemeiers and Kempinski needed to prove the “purely Minoan character” and had to contrast it with local practices to support their idea, an attitude that sharpens the already prevalent East-West-dichotomy.

The similarities in approach can be best seen within the Niemeiers’ reconsideration of the Alalakh frescoes, which indeed produced a very impressive result. What Woolley considered as leaves, the Niemeiers successfully recognized as a notched-plume-motif characterizing the wings of griffins or sphinxes in the Aegean (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 84) (Fig. 5). The Niemeiers reconstruct the fragments as a “Minoan griffin,” but unfortunately do not discuss the greenish color described by Woolley at its discovery, which would be unusual for a “Minoan griffin.” The current reconstruction shows a white griffin as we are used to see in Aegean iconography, and this is the image impressed in our perception.

The Aegeocentric perspective is even more evident in another example. Woolley’s cautious proposal of the horn as a bucranium was adopted by the Niemeiers, but they went far beyond it and reconstructed the remains of black outline at the edge of the fragment as a double axe between its horns (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 83) (Fig. 2). In doing so, any possible ambiguity of the representation is eliminated, and a purely “Minoan” image emerges. The narrow focus on parallels to the “Minoan” world leads both studies to a complete disregard of the only other iconographic detail of this fragment: a bichrome sequence of three horizontal ribbons, two ochre ones enclosing a purple/bluish one. Similar sequences are well known from the wall paintings of Mari. At a height of about 2 m, they decorated court 106, room 43 and 46, and even the color sequence is similar: two ochre-red bands enclosing a blue one (Parrot 1958a: 89–90, fig. 94, 177–78, fig. 204, 180–81, fig. 208). Even if the reconstruction of a bucranium with the double axe is indeed right, the sequence of bands alone should make us think of a possible hybridity in the painting.

A similar bias is encountered in some of Alalakh’s best preserved fresco-paintings: the representation of architectural elements in room 5 of the palace of level VII and in room 6 in house 39A in level IV (Fig. 4). Woolley described the depiction of low basalt-orthostats with wooden beams very briefly, without including them in his more far reaching interpretations based on the scheme of “ex oriente lux.” He clearly recognized them as representing local architecture, and their appearance in levels VII and IV supported his idea of a tradition within western Asia (Woolley 1955: 231).¹¹ Niemeier considers their iconography only in a very short remark with regard to stone

¹¹ Woolley nevertheless cites parallels in the Knossos LM II West Porch and MM III East Palace Border (Woolley 1955: 231; Evans 1935: 894, 896).

imitation (Niemeier 1991: 192). Thus, the best preserved wall paintings of Alalakh were relatively neglected. This is perhaps due to the fact that it is difficult not to connect them with the local architecture. The imitation of basalt orthostats reflects not only the local use of orthostats, but even their material, and the depiction of long wooden beams along the wall and transverse tie-balks are so close to the local masonry practices that a search for external inspiration would seem redundant. But the impact of this “localness” should not be underestimated: while they are less interesting for Woolley’s agenda of an “*ex oriente lux*,” their presence makes Niemeier’s argument unsupportable. If the fresco technique needs to be exclusively “Minoan,” a possible local representation executed in this technique weakens his whole thesis for a transfer of the technique in association with iconography by “Minoan” craftspeople.

The “marbling”-motif on the floor of Kabri might be a similar case. In the very beginning, it was exclusively compared to the dadoes of Thera and Crete (Niemeier 1991: 198). Only later did the Niemeiers add further examples of a podium, a platform and dadoes from Mari (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 73; Parrot 1958a: 67–69, fig. 54, pl. XV, 1–2; Parrot 1958b: 165, pl. XXXIX, 2, 166, fig. 187, pl. XXXIX, 1). But despite its extended use in the earlier *secco* murals of Mari, it was considered a purely Aegean motif and its appearance in Mari as an intrusion of a “Minoan” element.¹² The lack of stone in the local architecture at Mari was used as an argument that the region cannot be the place of origin of stone imitations (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 75, 76). But what makes a motif “Minoan”? I think the question of origin is not helpful in this regard. Even if the motif has been “invented” in another region, it seems to be completely incorporated into the local material culture of Mari, integrated in the architecture and iconography long before the floor paintings of Kabri. The assumption of the floor’s purely “Minoan” character leads to a dichotomy attributing single motifs to seemingly separated, never changing, and enclosed material cultures.

Temperament and Movement as “Minoan” paradigms

Already in the very first preliminary article about Tel Kabri, Niemeier and Kempinski considered the fresco technique at Alalakh and Kabri as “Minoan,” and consequently as a clear rejection of Woolley’s proposal of the Near Eastern ancestry of Cretan painting. Next to the known chronological considerations, the distribution of fresco-technique in western Asia was also an argument. Alalakh was presented as a singular, outstanding find spot with fresco painting prior to the discovery of Tel Kabri (Niemeier 1991: 195; Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 71). But how was it possible to reach such a

¹² See also Crowley 1989: 195, 202.

conclusion already at the very beginning of the 1990s? Niemeier's basis of comparison was exceptionally thin: next to Kabri and Alalakh only the very few fragments excavated by du Mesnil du Buisson at Qatna (1935) and the Mari murals were known in the broader region. Mari is far away on the middle Euphrates, clearly in a Mesopotamian sphere of influence (Parrot 1937, 1958; Moortgat 1959, 1964), and the recently studied corpus of Qatna has been shown to have been executed in fresco (Brysbaert 2011; von Rüdén 2011: 89–94). Thus, for the entire region west of the Euphrates, only four find spots were known for the second millennium BCE: two with identified fresco technique (Alalakh and Kabri), one with tempera (Mari) and one with unknown technique (Qatna) – an insufficient statistic for supporting Niemeier's interpretation. Are frescoes, since Childe's work, such an important marker for the “Western” modernity of the European “Minoans” that a shared use with their eastern neighbors cannot be possible? Even if we were to accept a first appearance in the West, this does not mean that it cannot be additionally a part of the local material culture of western Asia.

Scholars such as Niemeier supported the thesis that the fresco technique is linked to the “Minoans” using the additional argument that it was suited to their temperament (Niemeier 1991: 195); he referred also to his teacher, Schiering, who rhetorically asked: “Which technique would have been better suited to the mercurial Cretans than this fresco painting created completely out of the moment?”¹³ (Schiering 1960: 36). Surely fresco painting is not a craft that is created out of the moment, but involves detailed planning. But more relevant for our question is the direct link made between a technique and the mentality of an (ethnic) group, very similar to the way Parrot did for his characterization of the paintings in Mari in the first half of the twentieth century CE. Clearly the expression “Minoans” is here not considered as a simple *terminus technicus* for the material culture of Crete, but as a label for an ethnic group with its specific kind of temperament expressed in their material culture. Of course the appropriation of a complex technique like fresco painting is not easy and involves long learning processes (Brysbaert 2008), but Niemeier's argument nearly excludes a possible transfer across group or ethnic boundaries, and evokes Childe's assumption for the specifically Western nature of “Minoan art,” expressing the “truly occidental feeling for life.” The technical observations made by the team of the Tall Burak excavation might soon throw more light on this complex issue. The use of strings and other tools to prepare the surface has been considered by them as a possible pre-stage of the fresco-technique (Kamlah and Sader 2010: 96–97), while the iconography cannot be considered as “Aegean” or “aegeanized.” This would break the “Minoan” monopoly on fresco-technique in our minds.

¹³ Original German phrase: “Welche Technik hätte diesen quecksilbrigen Temperament der Kreter besser entsprochen als die ganz aus dem Moment schaffende Freskomalerei?”

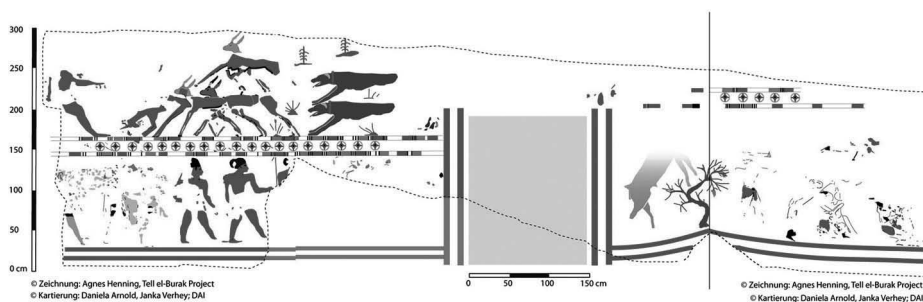


Figure 6: Wall painting of room 10, Tall Burak. Kamlah and Sader 2010: pl. 21.

It is not astonishing that the Niemeiers confirm Woolley's assessment that the plant motifs in Alalakh were executed "in the spirit of Cretan art" (Fig. 3). They consider their "sense of movement" as unknown in the iconography of western Asia (Niemeier 1991: 193; Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 69), but as characteristically "Minoan," even though they do not refer to a specific parallel in their discussion (Niemeier and Niemeier 2000: 784) – which is indeed not very easy. Furthermore, they add that there are not many "objects of art" from the late Middle Bronze Age Levant, characterizing the existing ones in generalized terms such as "stiff" and "motionless" (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 89). The topos of "movement" or "absolute mobility" was promoted by Groenewegen-Frankfort in the 1950s as the special characteristic of "Minoan" art in contrast to the representations of the Near East (1951: 191–205, especially 196, 198). This follows the tradition of Evans' and Childe's image of Minoan art as something exceptional and outstanding, hardly comparable to Near Eastern art. Other media, however, such as seals, for example, allow us a deeper insight into the more complex imagery of Middle and Late Bronze Age Syria. They show clearly that movement was already incorporated in the material culture of the region during the period of Alalakh VII, for example through the use of the so-called flying gallop on the palatial elite's seals (Collon 2000: Fig. 1a–c; von Rűden 2011: 108).

In this regard the very impressive recent findings at Tall Burak remove finally the scales from our Aegeanized eyes. Nearly the whole painted decoration of room 10 dating to the Middle Bronze Age I was found still on the wall (Fig. 6) (8 m by 2.5–3 m; Kamlah and Sader 2010: 102), and despite its bad preservation it gives us another insight in the complexity of the iconographies of western Asia. The murals seem to combine a procession, a hunting scene and a quadruped climbing at a tree (Kamlah and Sader 2010: 110). The highly interesting composition clearly shows Egyptian influences, and as proposed by the excavators Jens Kamlah and Helen Sader (2010: 110), the best parallel for the hunting-scene can be found in the tombs of Beni Hassan in Egypt. The poorly preserved predator is portrayed hunting gazelles, pursued by dogs with red collars. Both groups of animals are depicted in flying gallop. The scene is full of "movement" and shows clearly that this iconographic topos, which has been

considered a distinctive characteristic of Minoan iconography, was known in western Asia already that early and cannot be used to construct a dichotomy in the mode of representation of both cultures. And this might not be the only large-scale hunting scene in that area. A fragment discovered in a palatial structure at Tall Sakka close to Damascus, dated to Middle Bronze Age II, shows a hand encompassing a bow (Taraqji 2008: 39–40), the same weapon that can be assumed to have been held in the extended arm of the badly preserved hunter at Tall Burak. At both locales, Egyptian influences like the hunting scene or an Atef-Crown at Tall Burak are incorporated alongside more local elements, as for example goats climbing a tree, a motif we know already from Mari as well as from Egypt (Nunn 1988: 72, fig. 62; Shedid 1994: 80, Abb. 132; Taraqji 2008: 39–40; Kamlah and Sader 2010: 109–110). It seems that motifs and scenes of different traditions are combined in these compositions. Their hybridity is a core element of the local material culture¹⁴ also well known from other media of that region.

The Devil is in the Detail

The often very fragmented murals force scholars to restrict their analysis to single motifs in their comparison of iconography. Nearly whole compositions, which can show us the complex combinations of scenes and motifs, as is the case at Tall Burak, are very rare. The same problem emerges for the fragments of miniature paintings at Tel Kabri, recovered in a secondary context and used as filling material in the doorway leading from Hall 611 to the north (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 76–78). The identification by Barbara and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier of a series of Aegean motifs within the corpus of over 2000 very tiny fragments is impressive: sections of rocky shores, landscape and rough sea, curved grey brown stripes as possible boats, beam ends of architecture, flora and fauna like a swallow and a griffin; for all of them the best parallels can be found in the Miniature fresco of the West House on Thera. But we do not know anything about the composition of the motifs. Nevertheless the isolated fragments were embedded in a huge reconstruction, which is more or less a copy of the abovementioned Thera fresco (Fig. 7), and even a similar position at the wall has been proposed (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 76–78). One can easily begin from the misleading assumption that a whole sea journey is actually represented (Negbi 1994; Cline and Yassur-Landau 2007). But the published evidence we have up to now is restricted to two curved grey brown stripes, which can be maximally reconstructed to small-scale boats. Certainly, the Thera wall paintings have to be consulted as an inspiration to identify motifs, but a farreaching reconstruction of the whole composition on the base of this prototype can easily lead to circular arguments.

¹⁴ I concur with Kamlah and Sader (2010) who do not consider the paintings of Tall Burak as Egyptian, but as an expression of the local culture of the Middle Bronze Age.

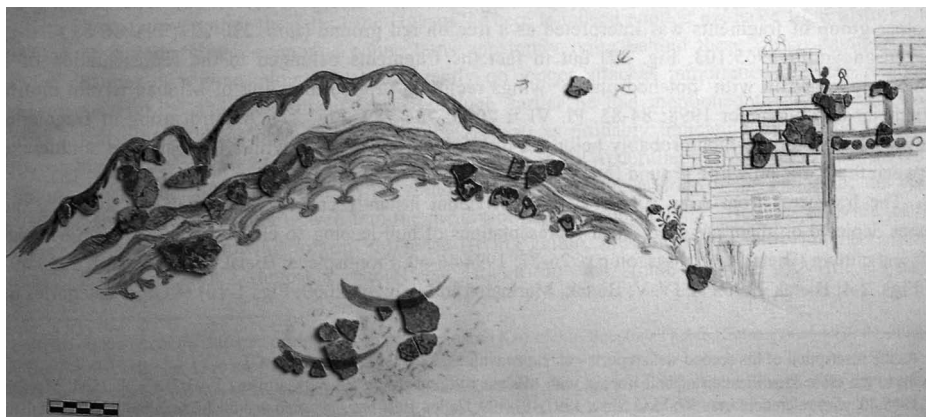


Figure 7: Miniature landscape of Tell Kabri. Niemeier and Niemeier 2002: fig. xxxiv.

The findings from Qatna, excavated in the very first years of the twenty-first century CE in a Late Bronze Age IIA context, might demonstrate the danger of this undertaking. As is the case for Tel Kabri, many motifs found among the Qatna paintings find their best parallels in the iconography of Thera, for example the undulating landscape, the palm trees or the dolphin (von Rügen 2011: 74–78, 81–83; and in press). Even the aquarelle-like execution of the miniature landscapes directly applied on the lime plaster finds its best parallels in Cycladic murals (von Rügen 2011: 78–79). If only single fragments of motifs had been found, our Aegeanized presumption might have easily led us to a quite similar impression as at Tel Kabri. But in Qatna, many fragments join, and we have been forced to accept a quite divergent and unusual compositional syntax for the paintings (Fig. 8). From the west wall, four trapezoidal panels have been reconstructed, all arranged above alternating wide red and thin white ribbons. Within the single trapezoidal panels, different compositions appear: a double spiral frieze, a diagonal band of leaves and at least two miniature landscapes. Unusual for an Aegean composition are, for example, the restriction of the spiral frieze within one of these panels instead of their procession across the whole wall of the room or the arrangement of a miniature landscape above a small frieze of two counter-rotating spirals (von Rügen 2011: 35–37, 65–70, pl. 1, 2). The latter perhaps evokes Moortgat's interpretation of the spirals enveloping the Investiture scene at Mari as a depiction of a textile element (Moortgat 1952). But also the syntax of the miniature landscape itself, its paratactic arrangement with a triple palm tree in the center accompanied by undulating rocks on both sides, is unusual and evokes more the palace-style pottery of the Greek mainland, but not the Theran wall paintings (von Rügen 2011: 39–41, 73–78, pls. 66, 67). Furthermore, below these panels, a black dado zone with irregular white dots is observable. Signs of this dado can be detected below three of the panels, but many more fragments of it have been found. Most probably the dado imitates basalt orthostats as at Alalakh (von Rügen 2011: 43–44, 81–82, pls. 30a, d, e). Similar

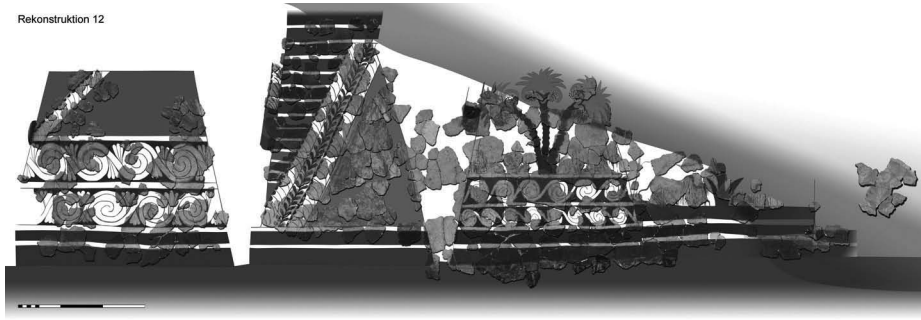


Figure 8: Reconstruction of the west wall, Qatna. Von Rüden 2011: pl. 69.



Figure 9: Reconstruction of the south wall, Qatna. Von Rüden 2011: pl. 68.

observations can be made with respect to the paintings from the south wall, which was decorated with a seascape with at least one dolphin, a crab, a fish, turtles and coral motif (von Rüden 2011: 47–50, 83–88, pl. 68) (Fig. 9).

The same situation can be seen with respect to the wall paintings at Tall Burak or even Tall Sakka. The Egyptian impact on both is evident, but their composition does not allow us to attribute them to an Egyptian craft. Like Kamlah and Sader for Tall Burak, Bietak (2007: 279) considers the Tall Sakka wall paintings as part of the local material culture, referring to a similar phenomenon in the local glyptic studied by Collon (1994: 81). The same should hold true for “Minoan” influences, but “Western research” has not followed this line of logic in the case of the use of Minoan motifs and techniques in the murals of western Asia.

Conclusion: Beyond the East-West Dichotomy in Syrian and Levantine Wall paintings

Research on Levantine and Syrian wall paintings suffered for many years from a too narrow focus on two interrelated themes. The first is the assumed Western link, a focus that began already in the first half of the twentieth century CE. In particular, Woolley’s perspective on his discoveries in Alalakh, which set the agenda for subsequent research, can be seen as the result of the idea of “ex oriente lux” and his wish to throw light on the emergence of “European culture” on Crete. Second is the desire on the part of researchers to see a “Minoan thalassocracy,” a desire that can be linked to

modern, early and mid-twentieth century politics in western Asia. This paved the way for the image of the “Minoan” not only as a successful seaman and trader, but also as a cultural agent, who was ultimately able to have an impact on Near Eastern art and culture. Research on wall paintings has, therefore concentrated on their association with “western Minoans,” not on their value and meaning for the people living in western Asia. The paintings were seen either as a prelude for the Minoan culture or as an outcome of Minoan supremacy on the sea and in specific craftwork.

Such an attitude resulted not only in the neglect of other possible influences or local aspects, but also facilitated and propagated further stereotypes about a strict dichotomy between Aegean and western Asian iconography, categorizing the fresco technique or the depiction of “movement” as “Minoan,” while the tempera technique and “stiff” representation were seen as “Eastern.” Within this “Aegeocentric” approach the focus was almost exclusively on the production and execution of the wall paintings, resulting in a disregard for their consumption. Aspects like their local social context, the local attribution of meaning, their involvement in local practices, and the agency of the local people were at the most marginally treated. But we have to be aware that wall paintings as an architectural element produce space together with the building overall and the human practices taking place therein. The attribution of meaning to the scenes and motifs depicted on the wall paintings depends on this produced space. Let us take, for example, the miniature landscape of Tel Kabri. While the Niemeiers consider it an Aegean landscape and the commemoration of a sea voyage (Niemeier and Niemeier 1998: 76–78), in the view of Cline and Assur-Landau (2007: 165–66) it depicts a Levantine landscape. Both approaches may rely, at least partially, on the scholars’ experiences and knowledge. Why should that not be the case for the second millennium BCE? Depending on who is consuming the image, the meaning varies. Reception and interpretation would have depended on the persons involved, such as, for example, the ruling family, officials, servants or soldiers, as well as foreign legations or foreigners living at the court. Their different experiences and knowledge would have produced different associations; the multivocality of the images is, therefore, evident. Images are not unambiguous, they leave space for different associations and maybe this is exactly what Levantine wall paintings wanted to achieve. They used motifs like palms, goats climbing trees, griffins or bulls, known and readable within the local material culture of different regions of the Eastern Mediterranean. But it is not only the observer who is active in this object-human interaction; the same applies to the space created by the architecture and by social practice. The building and the paintings were enveloping the visitor completely, and together with practices taking place in it, would have created meaning for the visitor – a meaning that would have had an impact on the way one makes associations about (and with) images. This continuously reciprocal process of human-object interaction in context of Levantine palaces might have been responsible for the manifold incorporation of foreign elements and the complexity of western Asian iconography. This is an endless process of mutual impacts and the reason for the immense fluidity of this

iconography, which cannot be categorized in the simplistic modernist categorizations of Eastern or Western.

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Ann C. Gunter

Orientalism and Orientalization in the Iron Age Mediterranean

Abstract: Over a century ago, scholars recognized a pre-Classical era in which Greek art came under the stimulus of Egypt and the Near East to a degree that invited the label “Orientalizing.” Recent archaeological discoveries have pushed back the inception of Iron Age communication between mainland Greece, Crete, and the Levant to the ninth and tenth centuries BCE, and emphasis has now shifted to the conspicuous role played by Phoenicians and their extensive Mediterranean trade networks in these contacts and interactions. The “Orientalizing” phase of Etruscan Italy, generally dated from the late eighth to early sixth centuries BCE and likewise first defined in the nineteenth century CE, acknowledges a comparably intense period of cross-cultural interaction, in which Phoenicians were key participants. For Classical Greece of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, new studies have reassessed the reception of “Persian luxuries” and documented in the realm of material and visual culture a complex, ambivalent relationship between Greece and the Achaemenid Empire. What kinds of artistic transmission and exchange took place across this geocultural space, and what do scholars today mean by the terms “Orientalizing” and “Orientalization”? How has the postcolonial concept of Orientalism elaborated by Edward Said and other scholars shaped approaches to analyzing relationships between the Near East and its Mediterranean neighbors in this period of antiquity? These issues concern the dissemination and reception of ancient Near Eastern art beyond its southwest Asian borders.

Keywords: artistic interaction, Orientalizing art

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Introduction

In the field of ancient Mediterranean studies, the term *Orientalizing* initially described an artistic style and a pre-Classical era recognized in the late nineteenth century, in which, under the stimulus of Egypt and the Near East, Greece acquired key features of civilization: an alphabetic script, metalworking techniques, and monumental stone architecture and sculpture. Beginning in the 1830s, exploration of Etruscan cemeteries in Italy uncovered richly furnished burials containing objects of foreign manufacture along with local works exhibiting influence from Near Eastern shapes and decorative formulas. The discoveries of decorated metalwork and ivories in Assyrian

palaces at Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) in northern Mesopotamia from the mid-nineteenth century CE onward were crucial in formulating this concept and establishing its chronology. Along with a chronological framework they furnished a set of regionally defined styles, at first characterized as Phoenician and Assyrian, for the decorated metal vessels found in Italy and on Cyprus (Riva and Vella 2006: 4–7). Subsequent excavations of Iron Age sanctuaries and tombs in the Aegean region yielded many additional examples of metalwork and ivories in Egyptian, Phoenician, and Syrian styles, together with smaller numbers of specimens representing other geographically circumscribed production centers: Phrygia, Urartu, and Iran (Braun-Holzinger and Rehm 2005). In addition, both in Greece and Italy a number of locally made works in a wide range of media demonstrates influence from Egyptian and Near Eastern art in subject, shape, or ornament, comprising the category usually called “Orientalizing” art.

For several reasons, the dissemination and reception of works of art, styles, and crafting techniques, along with the possible movements of artisans, are subjects that deeply involve the wider study of ancient Near Eastern art. First, excavations at sanctuaries and tombs in the Mediterranean have contributed significant quantities of Near Eastern and Egyptian works of art to the corpus known from southwest Asia and the Nile Valley.¹ In some cases, most notably that of the Phoenicians, entire categories of visual and material culture, such as decorated metalwork, are almost exclusively known from specimens unearthed outside their Levantine homeland. Decorated metalwork, ivories, faience (glazed composition and steatite), and glass attributed to Phoenician workmanship have been recovered from sites in Cyprus, Greece, Crete, and the Aegean islands; western Turkey; the Italian peninsula and nearby islands; and the Iberian peninsula.² Finds of Egyptian and Near Eastern artifacts in the Aegean and farther west have been classified according to regionally and culturally defined styles established by scholars in those fields. To date, however, they appear only occasionally in general surveys or handbooks treating the history of artistic production in southwest Asia or the Nile Valley.

In addition, Egyptian and Near Eastern written records and absolute chronologies, now supplemented by radiocarbon dates, have long furnished historical frameworks and key chronological anchors for early Iron Age Mediterranean developments. Greek ceramics of the Geometric and Archaic periods found in the Levant or Egypt, for example, are dated partly on the basis of archaeological contexts that in turn have been correlated with historical events mentioned in cuneiform sources (Table 1). Assyrian texts record a campaign against Hamath (modern Hama) in north Syria and its subsequent annexation by the armies of Sargon II in 720 BCE (Bagg 2011: 233–34).

¹ Leahy 1988; Skon-Jedele 1994; Braun-Holzinger and Rehm 2005; Seidl 2007.

² Markoe 1985, 2000; Falsone 1988; Aubet Semmler 2002; Sagona 2008; Strøm 1971; Rathje 1980; Neville 2007; Nijboer 2008.

Correlating this event with the Iron Age destruction level at the site provides an approximate date for the associated Greek ceramics, consisting of Euboian pendent semicircle skyphoi and a Middle Geometric II Attic pot (Whitley 2001: 64–65). Sennacherib’s destruction of Tarsus in 696 BCE establishes another fixed point, helping to date the Rhodian “bird bowls” and Early Protocorinthian aryballos (perfume flask) excavated from closed deposits beneath the destruction level at this important Cilician site.³ A scarab bearing the cartouche of the Dynasty 24 pharaoh Bokkhoris (Bakenranef) (ca. 720–715 BCE), recovered from a burial at Pithekoussai (modern Ischia) in the Bay of Naples, helps provide another chronological correlation for the associated grave goods, which included Early Protocorinthian aryballoi (Whitley 2001: 65; Ridgway 1999).

Table 1: Attic Ceramic Chronology (ca. 1050–700 BCE)

Early Protogeometric (EPG)	1050/1025–980 BCE
Middle Protogeometric (MPG)	980–960/950 BCE
Late Protogeometric (LPG)	960/950–900 BCE
Early Geometric I (EGI)	900–875 BCE
Early Geometric II (EGII)	875–850 BCE
Middle Geometric I (MGI)	850–800 BCE
Middle Geometric II (MGII)	800–760/750 BCE
Late Geometric I (LGI)	760/750–735 BCE
Late Geometric II (LGII)	735–700 BCE

Moreover, the “Oriental” presence in the Mediterranean sphere furnishes an exceptional opportunity for Near Eastern specialists not only to reconstruct long-distance contacts and relationships with neighbors to the west, but also to contemplate the distribution and impact beyond southwest Asia of artistic traditions developed in Anatolia, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Iran. Conferences examining cultural encounter and interaction between the Near East and Greece or Italy now take place with considerable frequency, and new monograph series and journals devoted to the subject have been launched over the past decade.⁴ Investigation of this relationship is

³ Whitley 2001: 64–65; Lehmann 2008: 217–18; cf. Forsberg 1995: 51–81.

⁴ Examples include the monograph series *Oriens et occidents* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000–) and the journal *Ancient West & East* (Leiden: Brill, 2002–). Among numerous recent conference proceedings treating relationships between “East” and “West,” with special reference to the Iron Age Mediterranean world, are Röllig and Prayon 2000; Bonfante and Karageorghis 2001; Stampolidis and Karageorghis 2003; and Rollinger *et al.* 2010. Ulf 2009 offers an important analysis, with additional bibliography.

clearly one of the field's most urgent priorities, and how it is conceptualized and accommodated must therefore be a topic of compelling interest. Yet viewing these resources, goods, and persons as "Oriental" is only one of several possible perspectives, and it effectively rules out investigating their movement and impact over a wider region as possibly related phenomena on which the rich textual and archaeological sources from the Near East could offer new insights. To this end, some scholars have now sought to situate Iron Age economic and cultural interaction between the Near East and Aegean worlds more specifically within a geographical and historical framework centered in the Neo-Assyrian Empire.⁵ The study of "Orientalizing" art, however, remains primarily within the purview of Greek or Etruscan specialists.

Closely linked in many current studies of "Orientalizing" developments in the Iron Age Mediterranean world is the concept of Orientalism, which at first described the academic study of Oriental (Middle Eastern, south Asian, and east Asian) languages, religions, and cultures. In the field of art history, Orientalism chiefly labels an early nineteenth-century genre of painting created mostly by French but also by other European and British artists, in which Middle Eastern and North African subjects predominate (MacKenzie 1995: 43–70; Peltre 2004; Hackforth-Jones and Roberts 2005). As a theoretical concept redefined toward the end of the twentieth century by the literary theorist Edward W. Said (1978), Orientalism now most often refers to Western colonial discourse about the Middle East and often the Arab world in particular (Hauser 2012). Stimulated in part by Said's influential work, scholars have lately explored Orientalism (in its postcolonial sense) in the literature and art of Classical and even pre-Classical Greece, primarily with respect to Greek perceptions and representations of "Eastern" peoples and, from the late sixth century, especially the Achaemenid Persians (E. Hall 1989, 2006; Cohen 2000). Drawing on literary, historical, and representational sources, scholars across a wide range of disciplines have newly elaborated the pivotal impact of the early fifth-century Persian Wars in fostering a collective Hellenic identity in large measure through the cultural construction, or invention, of the barbarian "Other" (E. Hall 1989; J. Hall 2002; cf. Gruen 2011). Renewed interest in the Greek response to non-Greeks, and especially the Athenian response to the Persians, has also followed on impressive scholarly achievements in the study of the Achaemenid Empire from a variety of Near Eastern textual and archaeological sources, along with fresh approaches to long-known Classical texts.⁶ Moreover, investigations of Greek interaction with non-Greeks in both the eastern and western Mediterranean have also prompted critical reexamination of the notion of a uniform "Greek" cultural identity in pre-Classical times – itself largely constructed by

⁵ Lanfranchi 2000; Rollinger 2001; Gunter 2009.

⁶ Briant 2002; Kuhrt 2007; www.achemenet.com.

Classical and especially Athenocentric perspectives (J. Hall 2002; Hales and Hodos 2010; Mitchell 2007).

In recent decades, the field of ancient Near Eastern studies itself has acknowledged and begun to address the ideological framework within which the European rediscovery of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern civilizations and the idea of Oriental monarchies – indeed, that of an “Orientalizing period” – came about. As areas of the eastern Mediterranean and southwest Asia under Ottoman Turkish rule came within British and western European imperial reach, the biblical lands of long-standing interest to Europe were opened to further penetration by traders, travelers, antiquarians, and missionaries. Important critical studies treating multiple aspects of this story have now appeared, including the European reception of Mesopotamian art in the nineteenth century (Bohrer 2003); a history of the terms “Fertile Crescent,” “Orient,” “Middle East,” and the shifting mental maps they reflect (Scheffler 2003); the early development of the field of Assyriology within an Orientalist tradition (Bahrani 1998; Holloway 2006; Hauser 2012); German Orientalism (Meyer-Zwiffelhofer 2007; Marchand 2009); and the political and diplomatic context of the French archaeological mission in Iran (Chevalier 2002). In addition, several scholars have reexamined concepts and assumptions deeply embedded in nineteenth- or early twentieth-century intellectual practices and notions of race, culture, gender, and ethnicity. Historians and art historians have demonstrated that Orientalist views of female sexuality and notions of the harem, for example, shaped the translation of texts and the investigation and interpretation of both representational evidence and architectural remains in Mesopotamia and Iran.⁷ Such studies have crucial implications for reconstructing the transmission to the Greek or Italic worlds – or “the West” more broadly – of “Eastern” cultural practices or material culture, when these have themselves been reconstructed on the basis of Orientalist preconceptions.

“Orientalizing” as an Artistic Style, Period, and Phenomenon in the Iron Age Mediterranean (ca. 1000–600 BCE)

In the 1840s, French and British explorations of Assyrian royal centers in northern Mesopotamia produced sensational finds of palaces and cuneiform archives, and incidentally also unearthed large quantities of Phoenician and Syrian metalwork and ivories. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Phoenician metalwork, ceramics, and carved stone came to light elsewhere in the central and eastern Mediterranean,

7 Van De Mieroop 1999: 146–51; Bahrani 2001: 161–79; Assante 2003: 19–30.

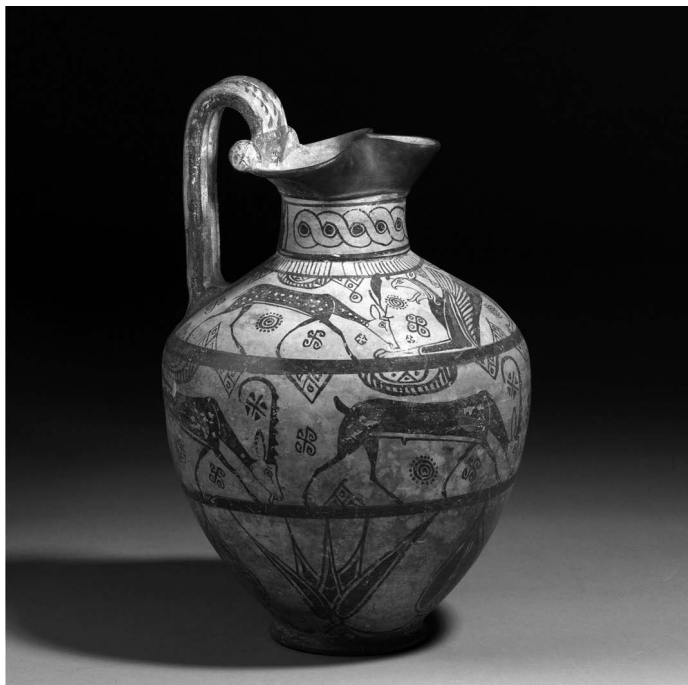


Figure 1: Oinochoe in “Wild Goat” style, Rhodes, ca. 630-600 BCE. Terracotta; H. 36.19 cm. London: British Museum GR 1867,0508.928. © Trustees of the British Museum.

chiefly in burials in Italy and on Cyprus but also at Sidon itself. Over the next few decades, the rediscovery of the Mycenaean age revealed a clearly earlier civilization whose relationship to the Greeks of the Classical period stimulated considerable discussion. In association, these discoveries allowed students of Greek vase-painting to establish that the styles initially called “Egyptian” and “Egyptianizing” to describe grave goods from Italy were in fact linked to Mesopotamia and the Levant. Comprehensive surveys and histories of individual media such as sculpture or vase-painting characterized Egyptian, Assyrian (and Chaldaean), and Phoenician works in contrast to Greek art. Beginning in the 1860s, large collections of ceramic vases displaying “Oriental,” “Orientalizing,” or “Graeco-Asiatic” decorative styles were recovered from cemeteries on the Aegean islands of Melos and Rhodes (Fig. 1). By then, archaeologists had developed relatively well-defined sets of traits defining the art of several regions or “nations” of the Near East, including Assyria, Phoenicia, Egypt, and later Lydia (Gunter 2009: 61–64, with bibliography).

With respect both to Greece and Italy, current literature, in contrast, often presents the notion of Orientalizing (and Orientalization) as a *process* or *phenomenon*, rather than a style or a chronologically discrete phase (of whatever duration or intensity). This distinction emphasizes investigating the circumstances under which new images

and technologies were selectively adopted and why – instead of assuming the inevitability of cultural change or a simple and unidirectional notion of influence.⁸

The Iron Age did not inaugurate significant or formative contact between Greece, Egypt, and the Near East. Textual studies and archaeological investigations have now established that commercial and diplomatic activities linked the Aegean world and the eastern Mediterranean littoral already in the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500–1200 BCE). Raw materials, including ingots of metal and glass, and finished goods such as decorated ceramic vessels, traveled over maritime routes connecting Egypt, the Levant, the southern coast of Turkey, Crete, and mainland Greece (Phillips 2010; Pulak 2010; Yasur-Landau 2010). Artistic transfer and exchange comprised an important component of this interaction, as attested by finds of Aegean-style wall paintings at sites in Egypt and the Levant, and an “international style” of luxury portable objects that combined Aegean, Levantine, and Egyptian features (Niemeier and Niemeier 2000, 2002; Feldman 2006). Recent archaeological discoveries have pushed back the inception of Iron Age communication between mainland Greece, Crete, and the Levant to the tenth and perhaps even the eleventh century BCE, suggesting that overseas contacts survived the destruction of Mycenaean sites and major disruptions at sites along the eastern Mediterranean coast (Lemos 2002; Snodgrass 2002; Kourou 2008). Even in this Early Iron Age period, it is clear that objects (and individuals) moved both east and west and that Cyprus played a key role in this intercourse. Some of the earliest Iron Age finds of Near Eastern metalwork and ceramics in the Aegean come from tombs excavated in the Toumba cemetery at Lefkandi on Euboea and at Tekke (Knossos) on Crete. Tenth-century contexts have yielded Greek pottery of similar date at sites on or inland from the Levantine coast chiefly in north Syria (Tell Afis, Ras el-Bassit) and Israel (Tel Dor, Tel Hadar, Tel Rehov) (Luke 2003: 31–44; Hodos 2006: 33–37).

But it was not until the ninth and especially the eighth and seventh centuries BCE that the interaction became sufficiently great in quantity, intensity, and geographic extent to merit in most scholarly accounts the label “Orientalizing.” This expansion of overseas contacts resulted in large measure from trade networks established from at least the tenth century onward by Phoenicians, initially from their homeland in the area of modern Lebanon. Kition, the most important Phoenician settlement on Cyprus, was established by the mid-ninth century, and the island remained for several centuries a major base of Phoenician commercial activity (Smith 2008, 2009). By the eighth century, Phoenician settlements lined the Mediterranean seaboard both north and south as far west as modern Spain and Portugal, including the islands of Sardinia and Malta off the Italian peninsula (Aubet 2001; Markoe 2000). Phoenician-style metalwork, ivories, and pottery found in tombs and sanctuary deposits as well as a Phoenician-style shrine at the site of Kommos, on the island’s south coast, may signal

⁸ Burkert 1992; Barker and Rasmussen 1998: 117–20; Whitley 2001: 102–106; Riva and Vella 2006: 10–14; cf. Purcell 2006.

sustained Phoenician contact with Crete from the mid-ninth century, perhaps including resident settlers (Kourou 2008; Stampolidis and Kotsonas 2006). In the eighth century also began a period of Greek overseas settlement across a wide area of the Mediterranean, ultimately extending from the eastern Aegean and the Levantine coast (and the Black Sea) to what is now northeastern Spain. Mother cities chiefly in mainland Greece and western Turkey founded overseas trade outposts (*emporion*) and settlements or “colonies” (*apoikia*), in which Greeks encountered native peoples, such as Etruscans and Sikels, along with other non-Greeks, such as Phoenicians (Tsetskhladze 2006–2008; Malkin 2009, 2011).

Scholarship concerned with Orientalizing issues in the realm of visual and material culture commonly addresses two major areas of investigation and analysis. The first consists in documenting the presence and context of tangible works or technologies of indisputable Near Eastern or Egyptian origin in areas outside southwest Asia and the eastern Mediterranean shores. Such material remains have been recovered primarily from sanctuaries and tombs on the Greek mainland, in western Turkey, on Crete, and in the Italian peninsula and nearby islands. Sanctuary deposits, consisting mostly of dedications to the local deity, include bronze sculptures representing deities, decorated equestrian equipment, cauldrons, and other metal objects, along with elaborately carved ivory containers and furniture fittings. Items recovered from tombs, including jewelry and a few metal bowls, are presumably the personal possessions of the deceased, or perhaps in certain instances were specially acquired for funerary deposition.

Studies of these “Oriental” imports typically have concentrated on attributing examples to regionally defined styles of metalwork and ivories, with the aim of identifying specific workshops of origin that in turn may also offer clues to the means or routes of transmission by which these objects or motifs traveled to points farther west. Indeed, this simple model that initially recognized a few major production centers – chiefly Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia, and Assyria – informed early approaches to “Orientalizing” art in Greece and Italy, and helped establish the Phoenicians as intermediaries in the transmission of works in Mesopotamian or Egyptian styles or shapes (Poulsen 1912; Perrot and Chipiez 1911: chap. XX). Over the past half-century, scholars have reconstructed for the early first-millennium Near East a vastly more complex and chronologically nuanced picture of multiple production centers and even individual workshops, especially with respect to the key categories of bronze and ivories.⁹ This new understanding of artistic production across multiple media renders problematic traditional attempts to identify the geographical or stylistic “home” of objects or motifs found in contexts far removed from their place of origin, or to reconstruct with any confidence the specific routes by which they traveled to new destinations. This paper’s final section addresses some of these issues.

⁹ For bronzes, see Curtis 1988; for studies of metalwork and especially ivories, see the papers in Suter and Uehlinger 2005 and Cecchini, Mazzoni, and Scigliuzzo 2009; Herrmann and Laidlaw 2009.



Figure 2: Bowl with sphinx frieze, Phoenician style, 9th-8th century BCE; found at Nimrud. Bronze; D. 21.7, H. 2.85 cm. London: British Museum ME 115505. © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 3: Bowl with figural friezes, Chios, ca. 600 BCE; found at Naukratis. Terracotta; D. 38.0, H. 17.75 cm. London: British Museum GR 1888.6-1.456. © Trustees of the British Museum.

The second main area of “Orientalizing” artistic investigation considers influence on local artistic production, which may range from the adoption of materials and associated manufacturing technologies or the imitation of themes, figural or ornamental motifs, and forms or shapes. In the realm of visual and material culture – that is, as an artistic phenomenon – Orientalizing traditionally refers to the large-scale introduction to Greek art of a Near Eastern repertoire of images and motifs such as sphinxes, monsters, and other exotic creatures, and new floral ornaments, together with metalworking technologies and decorative techniques. Figure 2 illustrates a shallow bronze bowl in the style generally labeled Phoenician and likely of Phoenician workmanship, decorated on the interior with a frieze or procession of winged creatures arranged in a concentric register around a central rosette. While this example was found at Nimrud, in northern Mesopotamia, Phoenician-style bowls of similar type have been recovered from sanctuaries and tombs on the Greek mainland and Crete (Kourou 2008: 320–28). In Figure 3 is shown the kind of response or adaptation typically called Orientalizing art, a product presumably of Greek workmanship that emulates, adapts, or draws on Near Eastern (Oriental) prototypes for such features as shape, subject, and arrangement of decoration. The interior of this ceramic bowl, made on the eastern Aegean island of Chios, contains a central rosette or floral ornament and a concentric frieze of wild goats, lions, and fantastic creatures surely inspired by Near Eastern examples. Greek vase-painting of the late eighth and especially the seventh century displays a wide range of Orientalizing styles distinguished by technique, ornament, subject, and decorative scheme (Boardman 1998).

Still another widely recognized component of Orientalizing Greek art is the production in metal, ivory, or faience of works fashioned so closely on Near Eastern or Egyptian models that specialists may reasonably disagree on distinguishing local from foreign workmanship. Is the figurine reproduced in Figure 4 the product of Greek artisans adapting foreign forms, materials, and styles, or is it in fact an imported work? One famously contested group consists of decorated bronze shields (or *tympana*) recovered from the Idaian Cave sanctuary on Crete.¹⁰ Certain large classes of Orientalizing objects, including faience artifacts and bronze cauldron attachments in the form of griffins or sirens, have presented particularly complex problems of attribution, appealing to technical analysis to assist in distinguishing among production centers and workshops (Muscarella 1992; Skon-Jedele 1994: 291–391). Many scholars of Greek art contend that they can nearly always distinguish Greek from Near Eastern authorship through close study of an individual work and its style.¹¹ Artisans of Orientalizing works, in this view, often deliberately sought to express Greek identity in works that borrowed from “Eastern” prototypes. Thus, with respect to the same ivory

¹⁰ Curtis 1994: 11–17; Hoffman 1997: 160–65; Braun-Holzinger and Rehm 2005: 95–102; Whitley 2009: 277–81, 287.

¹¹ See, for example, the discussions found in Boardman 1967: 108; Hurwit 1985: 133.



Figure 4: Figurine of goddess. Athens, Dipylon cemetery, Late Geometric, ca. 750–725 BCE. Ivory; H. 24 cm. Athens, National Museum 776. Photo: Emile, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens, Neg. 897. All rights reserved.

figurine (Fig. 4), “the artist has taken the Near Eastern material and type and transformed them into something purely Greek. The act of doing so is at the same time a mark of respect for and emulation of the eastern craft tradition and an assertion of Greek identity.”¹² Scholars have sometimes offered a similar interpretation for the Greek *kouros*, the freestanding male statue type generally carved in marble, which appeared in the third quarter of the seventh century BCE. While Greek literary tradition and modern scholarship identify the statue type’s source in Egyptian sculpture, stone-working techniques, and canonical proportions, the distinctive nudity of the Greek *kouros* – contrasted with the clothed Egyptian examples – is often considered a statement of Greek identity (Hurwit 1985: 133; Hoffman 2005: 381). Histories of Greek art tend to emphasize key differences between Egyptian and Greek male statues in style, function, and meaning.¹³ Yet the specifically Greek meanings of the sculptures could only be achieved through Egyptian methods of design and production (Tanner 2003: 132–39).

A different perspective much explored in recent decades contends instead that a neat division between “Greek” and “Near Eastern” is often difficult and sometimes impossible to draw, and that what we are witnessing is a cultural continuum across the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. In studies examining areas of human endeavor as diverse as literature, religion, science, art, and law, these categories seem increasingly to overlap or merge.¹⁴ For many of these scholars there is no clear boundary between “Greek” and “Oriental,” or, presumably, “East” and “West.” In this view, argued by specialists in literature and religion as well as in visual and material phenomena, Greek culture had an “Orientalizing dimension,” and for some this ambiguity with respect to cultural boundaries extended from the Late Bronze Age to the time of the Persian Wars (Morris 1992: 130). This perspective has constructively situated Greece in a larger Mediterranean world, albeit one thus far focused almost exclusively on the Levant.¹⁵ Such a viewpoint equally has clear implications for the concept of “ancient Near Eastern art,” which scholars have yet to explore in detail.

Other scholars have emphasized instead the uses of Oriental and Orientalizing art in the context of social conflicts generated largely *internally* to the Greek world by processes of state formation, which began in the eighth century. Ian Morris recognizes within the corpus of Archaic Greek poetry two separate and antithetical cultural

¹² Fullerton 2000: 60. “While taking up ideas and goods from the ‘Orient’ and deploying them as instruments to reinforce their power at home... Greeks at the same time lay claim not just to independence from but even to superiority over those who bring those goods and ideas as they redeploy them in ways adapted to their own... purposes” (Osborne 2006: 157).

¹³ Boardman 1967: 97–98; Hurwit 1985: 193–97; Osborne 1998: 76–79.

¹⁴ Burkert 1992; 2004: 21–48; West 1997; López-Ruiz 2010.

¹⁵ Others, including specialists studying the transmission of literary genres and religious practices, have emphasized similarities with second-millennium Anatolian traditions. See, for example, Bachvarova 2008, 2009.

traditions concerning the East, which were reflected in the realm of material culture and social practices. One was a “middling” tradition, in his words, expressed largely through elegy and iambus, in which the values of the Greek city-state (*polis*) were paramount and defined in opposition to the luxury and tyranny associated primarily with the kingdom of Lydia. By contrast, the “elitist” tradition drew on the heroic ideals of Homeric poetry, constructing a world of sophisticated consumption epitomized by forms of private luxury. This aristocratic lifestyle was modeled closely on Lydian courtly privilege and customs, associated with clothing made of expensive and ornately decorated fabrics, gold jewelry, and social gatherings that included reclining on couches and drinking wine.¹⁶

Contact with Near Eastern visual and material culture varied significantly in quantity, intensity, and duration among different regions of the Aegean and in Mediterranean zones farther west. Crete, for example, has yielded an abundant record of imported works of indisputably foreign origin, along with evidence for local artistic response in a wide range of media. Significant votive deposits of decorated ivories and metalwork in North Syrian and Phoenician styles have been found at the rich Idaian cave sanctuary dedicated to Cretan Zeus. Early developments in large-scale limestone temple architecture and in sculpture, the so-called Daidalic style, have long been associated with artistic influence from Egypt and the Levant.¹⁷ Some of the Greek sanctuaries, especially the Panhellenic sanctuaries (such as Olympia and Delphi) and those with significant foreign investment (such as Samos), are especially rich in metal and ivory imports from Egypt or the Near East. These finds are interpreted by some as personal possessions that foreign visitors dedicated to the sanctuaries and by others as exotic and prized acquisitions offered as votives by Greeks. Yet the presence of Near Eastern or Egyptian imports does not invariably correlate with a vigorous local response to “Oriental” stimuli. At Corinth, for example, which produced the early Orientalizing vase-painting style known as Protocorinthian (ca. 725–625 BCE), excavations have yielded comparatively few examples of foreign imports or imitations dating to the eighth century. Intriguingly, Protocorinthian decoration initially appears on aryballois, perhaps deliberately designed to advertise or “brand” the vessels’ exotic, “Eastern” contents (Rasmussen 1991: 66). Only a few Egyptian or Egyptian-style objects have been recovered from seventh- and sixth-century BCE Athens, and yet the city’s Orientalizing Protoattic pottery exhibits acquaintance with Egypt’s traditions of monumental art (Skon-Jedele 1994: 40–44). These circumstances point to complex relationships of interaction along multiple pathways and exchange routes.

Most current reconstructions of Greek and Near Eastern encounters favor Phoenician and Greek commercial activities and networks, along with forms of ceremonial

¹⁶ I. Morris 1997; 2000: 155–91; 2009: 76–78. See also Brisart 2011, who also emphasizes the social dimensions of Orientalizing objects within the emerging city-state of the late eighth and seventh centuries BCE.

¹⁷ S. Morris 1992: 238–56; Tanner 2003: 132–39; Whitley 2009: 276–82, 287–88; Brisart 2011: 273–314.

transfer such as aristocratic gift-exchange and dedications to Greek sanctuaries, as the chief means by which foreign works of art and styles arrived in the Aegean world. According to some scholars, artisans from North Syria or Phoenicia – perhaps even specifically individuals seeking new homes and patrons following Assyrian conquests in Anatolia and the Levant – arrived in the Aegean and introduced new materials or crafting methods. The hypothesis of immigrant artisans has most often been invoked to explain “Orientalizing” developments on Crete, where Phoenicians seem to have resided at Kommos on the island’s south coast and arguably also at Knossos and Eleutherna in the north.¹⁸ Near Eastern metalsmiths have also been postulated to account for the style and especially the technique of gold jewelry found in a rich female burial on the Athenian Akropolis (Coldstream 1995). As evidence for Near Eastern and Egyptian objects in the Aegean world continues to accumulate, however, many facts are not explained by postulating either Phoenician- or Greek-dominated networks organized to conduct profit-motivated trade, exploit natural resources, or create new markets. Other kinds of contacts and networks must also have served as important pathways for the movement and transfer of some of the items found in either funerary or sanctuary contexts. Ingrid Strøm (1992: 49–57) has observed that Phoenician bronze relief bowls and North Syrian bronze cauldrons with cast siren attachment or animal handles have been recovered from a group of sanctuaries widely distributed in geographical terms but representing a narrow range of deities: Hera, Apollo, Artemis, and Athena. She suggests that these objects were not dedications but rather cult-related equipment perhaps introduced with the tradition of wine-drinking at banquets, and whose availability sanctuary officials would presumably have attempted to ensure.

Was there a reciprocal reception of Greek visual or material culture among Near Eastern populations in this period, either in their homelands or in their overseas settlements, or did artistic and cultural “influence” only travel in one direction? In the case of Greek ceramic imports at sites along the Levantine coast or in Cilicia, scholars disagree on the identity of the vessels’ owners. For some, Greek ceramic vessels (especially the two-handled drinking cups called skyphoi) can only signal Greek consumers, and thus a local settlement of Greek residents at sites such as Al Mina and Tyre (Boardman 2004). Tellingly, however, these sites have yielded no close copies in fabric and style that would indicate locally produced vessels fashioned by expatriate Greek potters, and skyphoi have also been found in burials at Hama and at Phoenician Khalde near Beirut (Coldstream 2006: 50–52; Luke 2003: 33). The Greek ceramic imports found at sites in the Levant are almost exclusively vessels used for wine consumption: amphorae, cups, and kraters. One interpretation sees them as ritual hospitality gifts to members of the local elite, who employed them for their own banqueting traditions (Luke 2003: 47–56). In the central and western Mediterranean, Phoenicians certainly

¹⁸ Burkert 1992: 21–25; Hoffman 1997: 153–245; cf. Kotsonas 2006; Stampolidis and Kotsonas 2006.

incorporated the skyphos into their dining repertoire. At Pithekoussai in the Bay of Naples, Phoenician Red Slip plates occur along with locally made copies and free adaptations, suggesting that resident Phoenicians introduced the neighboring Euboian settlers to this previously unfamiliar vessel shape (Coldstream 2006: 49–50).

Banqueting customs and gift-exchange are likewise thought to explain many aspects of the “Orientalizing” period on the Italian peninsula and adjacent islands, a style of art and chronological horizon associated particularly with the Etruscan centers in the north and their broader sphere of influence (Camporeale 2004). Etruscan involvement with the wider Mediterranean world resulted primarily from interaction with Phoenicians and Greeks, who first established settlements and trading outposts in south Italy and nearby islands in the late ninth and early eighth centuries BCE. Phoenicians settled on Sardinia and Sicily, and traded with northern Etruscan cities such as Populonia and Vetulonia. Greeks founded colonies in south Italy and on Sicily, beginning with the Euboian settlement at Pithekoussai before 750 BCE, conducting trade with native peoples such as Sikels and Etruscans. Communal feasting and wine-drinking were customs associated with an aristocratic lifestyle, as reflected in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and they could have been learned from Greek settlers in South Italy or Sicily, or from Phoenicians who traded in the Italian peninsula and whose own colonies were located on nearby islands (Rathje 1990, 1994, 1998).

This aristocratic culture is especially visible in Etruscan elite burials of the period, which in the seventh century began to take the form of large, highly visible tombs. Many are richly furnished with imports or works in foreign styles, often made of precious materials such as gold and ivory, and they also contain banqueting vessels and objects signaling social and political status: chariot, scepter, and throne (Spivey 1997: 40–52; Naso 2000, 2007; Riva 2006). Etruscan art of the late eighth and seventh centuries displays a new interest in representing human and animal forms, surely inspired by both Greek and Near Eastern examples. While artisans from the Levant are often credited with introducing sophisticated metalworking techniques such as granulation, local craftsmen would have had access both to models and to resident foreign expertise and may have produced many of the surviving works.¹⁹

As with the Aegean world, Etruscan specialists increasingly emphasize the role of internal social and political changes in understanding Orientalizing developments in the Italian peninsula and farther west. Within a few generations, as Etruscan society moved from defining social position within family groups to a social hierarchy created outside family groups, elites used Eastern material and nonmaterial objects, such as

¹⁹ Scholars disagree on the provenance of Phoenician-style decorated bronze and silver bowls found in Etruria, whereas many of the bronze ribbed drinking bowls (*patera*) are attributed to local workmanship (Sciacca 2005). Recent discussions concerning the workshops of origin of the decorated bowls include Haynes 2000: 59–60, 75–79; Strøm 2001; Markoe 2003, with additional references; Vella 2010.

new techniques for preparing food and drink, to construct a funerary ideology underlying new forms of political authority (Riva 2010).

Orientalism and Orientalization

Chronologically prior to “Orientalizing” appeared the term *Orientalism*, which from the late eighteenth century designated the study of the languages, cultures, and religions of the Orient. *Orient* embraced those regions east of Europe (the West, or Occident), from the eastern Mediterranean shores as far as East Asia, but it more frequently described what are now commonly known as the Middle East and South Asia, sometimes including the Islamicate countries of North Africa (Hauser 2012). The 1978 publication of Edward W. Said’s book titled *Orientalism* stunningly and irrevocably redefined the term. Orientalism, for Said (1978: 1), was “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience.” From his perspective grounded in critical theory and comparative literature, Orientalism was “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” and essentially derived from an asymmetry of knowledge and power in the broadest sense (Said 1978: 3). Since Great Britain and France were the states that chiefly exercised such power from the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Said maintained, Orientalism was fundamentally the product of these two Western cultures. Said’s work has generated a considerable critical response, both positive and negative. Critics have questioned the theoretical foundations of his work and the privileging of literature as an historical source, among other issues (Irwin 2006: 3–6, 277–309; Hauser 2012, with extensive bibliography). Despite objections voiced by specialists both in critical theory and academic Orientalism, however, the ideological dimension accorded the term has substantially endured, together with its trenchant challenge to scholarly objectivity and authority.

In Said’s defining text, Orientalism was inextricably linked with modern European, especially British and French, imperialism. Yet he also recognized a genealogy of Orientalism, manifested perhaps earliest in fifth-century BCE Athenian drama and specifically in Aeschylus’s *Persians* and Euripides’s *Bacchae* (Said 1978: 55–57). “Orientalization” in the context of the Greek response to Persia most often describes the construction in literature and art of a barbarian enemy characterized by luxury, extravagance, despotism, and effeminacy. Persian material culture (and Persians) appear both as objects of emulation and subjects of representation in various media, of which vase-painting chiefly survives. In a seminal study of the “invention” of the barbarian in fifth-century Athens, Edith Hall (1989: 56–159; 2006: 184–224) analyzed theatrical representations of non-Greeks and especially of Achaemenid Persians, elaborating ways in which they employed language, dress, behavior, and other dramatic techniques to portray the newly defeated Persians as “other.” Many would

concur in identifying “the origins of Orientalism” in the conflict between Greeks and Persians, while others recognize a nascent or “proto-Orientalism” in an even earlier period of Greek history, in Homer’s depiction of Trojans, Phoenicians, and other non-Greek peoples in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.²⁰

For a later period of antiquity, recent studies of Rome and its barbarians to the east and north have elaborated the visual and literary rhetoric of Orientalism. Rolf Michael Schneider (2006, 2007) has explored Roman representations of the Parthians, the rival empire centered in Mesopotamia and Iran. Rather than a consistent negative portrayal of “Eastern barbarians,” Roman depictions of Parthians were complex and ambivalent. One image consisted of a stereotypical ethnic Parthian, cast as a strange and threatening enemy; another set of images portrayed a handsome, even beautiful male, which could also be employed for mythical and religious figures. “The image oscillated between Trojan friend, venerated Oriental deity and Parthian enemy,” Schneider (2007: 79) concludes, “and embodied a strange conceptual overlap between the categories of friend and foe.” By the time the Sasanians rose to power in the third century CE, Matthew Canepa (2009: 37–38) observes, the image of the “Parthian” or “Eastern barbarian” was well established in Roman visual culture and available as a template for representations of the Sasanians. While the image of the Eastern other both as subject king and as a figure of exotic and desirable beauty persisted in Roman visual culture after the Sasanians consolidated their rule over the Parthians, it became problematic given the power and threat that the new Iranian dynasty posed to Rome.²¹

While Roman literary sources can support a contemporaneous notion of world division between Orient and Occident, some specialists in Iron Age Mediterranean art and culture have challenged the genealogy of Orientalism proposed by Said and others, resisting the adoption of an Orientalist perspective to analyze developments in Classical or even Hellenistic times. Fresh approaches that draw on other critical concepts in postcolonial theory, including hybridity, transculturation, and creolization, have sought to avoid the “self” and “other” polarities of Orientalism. In the Iron Age Mediterranean sphere, these approaches to date have chiefly addressed colonial encounters between Greeks or Phoenicians and indigenous peoples in the central and western Mediterranean. These conceptual frameworks, which emphasize adaptation and accommodation rather than confrontation, have demonstrated promising results in the realm of visual and material culture.²² New contributions in history and art

20 S. Morris 1992: 362–86. “Consider first the demarcation between Orient and West. It already seems bold by the time of the *Iliad*” (Said 1978: 56). For “proto-Orientalism,” see also Winter 1995; cf. E. Hall 1989: 47–55; J. Hall 2002: 117–21.

21 By analogy with Said’s concept of Orientalism, Christopher Krebs (2011) has coined the term “borealism” to describe a Roman discourse about the Germanic north as revealed in the writings of Caesar, Seneca, and Tacitus.

22 Antonaccio 2005; van Dommelen 2006; Malkin 2002, 2004; cf. Dietler 2009: 28–34. Marian H. Feldman (2006: 59–71) has productively explored the concept of visual hybridity in understanding icono-

history have further deconstructed “the Orient” and “Otherness” in Classical times. Historians have challenged traditional interpretations of texts such as Herodotos’s *Histories*, long considered indisputable evidence for the early fifth-century molding of Hellenic identity through the invention of the barbarian.²³ In her study of the Athenian reception of Persian culture, Margaret C. Miller (1997) turned to episodes in the modern European reception of Oriental imports – specifically turquerie and chinoiserie – to assist in formulating an analogous ancient phenomenon she labeled *Perseïe*. She elaborated a range of Attic responses to Persian visual and material culture, such as imitation, adaption, and derivation. Keith DeVries has examined under the rubric of the “nearly Other” Attic Greek representations of Phrygians and Lydians, themselves “ambitiously Hellenizing but irreducibly non-Greek ethnic groups” (2000: 339).

At present, no consensus has emerged concerning the relationship between the notion of Orientalization and the postcolonial concept of Orientalism. Irene J. Winter (1995: 263) suggested that we might expect an Orientalizing period to be “one most prone to ‘orientalism.’”²⁴ David Wengrow (2006: 30) has proposed instead a relationship of opposition: “the former [Orientalization] seems to refer to processes of concrete cultural interaction, while the latter describes the fashioning of a self-image predicated upon distance from an exotic ‘Other.’”²⁵

The Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Eastern Mediterranean Artistic Landscape

Much traditional scholarship concerned with “Orientalizing” Greek art shares a notion of “the East” that seems to have been profoundly shaped by modern, Orientalist perspectives. Frequently these accounts describe “the East” as mysterious, even hypnotic and capable of ultimately dangerous seduction: “a truly Orientalizing work [is] a Greek artisan laboring under the spell of the East” (Hurwit 1985: 126). Reference to contemporaneous reality often mixes with legend and Greek tradition: Trojans, Amazons, and Phoenicians exist and occasionally coexist there, while a monolithic notion of the Orient denies actual cultural, political, and ethnic diversity. Despite the Greeks’ limited contact with the Near East along the Levantine coast, they could

graphic and stylistic intermixtures among Late Bronze Age luxury arts across the eastern Mediterranean. See also Vella 2010 on “Phoenician” bowls.

23 Recent studies include Thomas 2000: 28–74; Gruen 2011: 21–39; Moyer 2011: 2–36.

24 “‘Orientalism’ lies at the very heart of ‘Orientalizing’” (Osborne 2006: 157).

25 A. Bernard Knapp (2006: 60) draws a distinction with respect to Late Bronze Age interaction: “*Orientalism* [his italics] is a colonialist enterprise that denies eastern agency; Orientalization is a notion that literally encapsulates and demands local agency, whether western or eastern.”

nonetheless “know” the whole Orient. Another persistent assumption, yet one seldom explicitly stated, was that Assyria prefigured Persia as the paradigmatic Orient. A perceived continuity between the Assyrian and Achaemenid Persian empires followed nineteenth-century histories that classified them with other Oriental monarchies. In these accounts, the lifecycle of the Persian Empire as preserved in Greek tradition had also become paradigmatic: Oriental monarchies exhibit an extended period of decline or decadence prior to their eradication, and the ancient Orient – like the modern Orient – was both decadent and ripe for European dominance (Gunter 1990: 131–35). As a consequence of these implied parallels with ancient Persia and the modern Orient, the Neo-Assyrian Empire is traditionally considered remote, distant, little known by the Greeks, and in a state of decline anticipating its collapse in 612 BCE.

A perception of continuity between the Assyrian and Achaemenid empires surely helped fuel the conviction that the Near East had produced an unbroken succession of states exemplifying Oriental despotism. Given the picture of the empire long offered by ancient Near Eastern specialists themselves, moreover, it was plausible to postulate a comparable Greek hostility to “the Orient” in pre-Classical times that anticipated the anti-Persian rhetoric of the fifth century BCE. Art historians, most influentially Henri Frankfort (1954), reconstructed a Mesopotamian “core” centered in the Assyrian heartland of northern Iraq, surrounded by a “periphery” composed of the inferior arts common to peoples such as the Phoenicians. And, indeed, the archaeological picture available to Frankfort’s generation seemed to confirm the model of an imperial center with monumental palaces in northern Mesopotamia – far removed, in every sense, from the empire’s western frontier zones with which Greeks would have come into contact (Fales 2009: 243). One major reason to reappraise traditional interpretations of “Orientalizing” art is precisely the dramatic development in scholarship on the visual and material culture of the Neo-Assyrian Empire achieved since Frankfort’s survey. As archaeologists expanded their focus beyond Iraq both east and west, and as new editions of Neo-Assyrian texts have yielded a considerably richer and more nuanced picture of the empire and its visual culture, it has become clear that Assyrian court art and practices reached from the Levant to western Iran. By the seventh century, the most intense period of Orientalizing contact in both Italy and Greece, Assyrian control had extended to Cyprus and Egypt as well as to the southern Arabian peninsula.

An earlier generation of scholars recognized parallels or similarities between Assyrian art and major developments in Greek art of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. T. J. Dunbabin (1957: 41–42, 48–49) remarked that certain features of early Greek Orientalizing art, such as scenes of warfare and depictions of lions, exhibited features specifically associated with Assyrian art. But he concluded that Greek knowledge of Assyrian subjects, iconography, ornament, and style must have been acquired through “intermediaries,” either material – such as patterned textiles – or geographical – such as architecture or funerary monuments in North Syria, where finds of Greek pottery indicated the presence of Greek traders or perhaps mercenaries. Exception-

ally, George M. A. Hanfmann (1957: 72–73) proposed that contact with the monumental art of Egypt and Assyria had profound consequences for the development of Greek narrative art. But most scholars have attributed the presence of Assyrian (or more generally Mesopotamian) finds in the Aegean region and Assyrian elements in Greek art to the action of intermediaries, tending to view Assyria as effectively outside the boundaries of “Orientalizing” developments.²⁶ For the most part, the empire has existed as a shadowy presence on the eastern fringes of the Orientalizing world, a vast political entity that nonetheless seems to have remained outside recorded Greek consciousness. Occasionally it has furnished hints of direct knowledge of Greeks, in texts that refer to a people called the Yamnaya/Yawnaya, “Ionians,” perhaps Greek mercenaries employed by Assyrian kings or their agents along the eastern Mediterranean coast. Thus far, however, Assyrian written records have failed to produce much evidence that these worlds intersected directly or at least not to any significant degree (Rollinger 2001, 2006, 2007).

Yet it can also be argued that the transfer and reception of works in foreign styles within an Assyrian imperial setting can nonetheless shed light on the transfer and reception of closely related objects and technologies in the nearby Aegean sphere. Decorated bronze vessels and horse trappings, carved ivory furniture and containers, and faience amulets and figurines – fashioned in or incorporating North Syrian, Phoenician, and Egyptian images and styles – traveled east as well as west, to the Assyrian royal centers in northern Mesopotamia and beyond the imperial frontiers to western Iran. Phoenician merchants and artisans journeyed throughout the Mediterranean world but also headed east, to Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. North Syrian, Phoenician, and Egyptian styles, iconographies, and techniques of manufacture and decoration were developed and brought to new locations by artisans working within their native traditions and by local artisans who copied, adapted, and reworked foreign models. Moreover, Neo-Assyrian texts and representations establish that many finely crafted ivories, metal artifacts, and textiles not only were prized as luxury objects but also played significant roles in imperial strategies of appropriation and control. They were seized as booty, required as tribute, kept in palace and temple storehouses, and given as gifts to conquered rulers and other foreigners. In association, these sources elaborate ideologically charged works of art that were transferred along specific pathways by means of rituals that established or confirmed relationships of domination and deference. Once given to foreigners these objects must often have traveled further, sometimes beyond the imperial frontiers, functioning with local networks of gift exchange and other forms of ceremonial transfer (Gunter 2009: 155–77).

²⁶ Note the generally skeptical critical reception of Gudrun Ahlberg’s study of parallels between Neo-Assyrian reliefs and Greek Geometric vase-painting: Coldstream 1974; Benson 1970: 95.



Figure 5: Ram-headed situla. Gordion, Tumulus MM, ca. 740 BCE. Bronze; L. 29.3 cm. Ankara, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations 12508. Photo courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, image #103009.

While items of tribute and booty moved principally from conquered lands to the Assyrian heartland, finished objects made of valuable materials traveled both within the royal centers and thence outward. Assyrian kings gave gifts of personal ornaments, clothing, and weapons as signs of esteem to military officers and highly placed courtiers (Gunter 2009: 171–77, with bibliography). The empire created a multicultural ruling class whose identity was constructed to a significant degree through shared items of material culture, as elites of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds adopted Assyrian dress, hairstyles, and insignia, and sometimes owned portable objects made of costly materials and fashioned in multiple styles: ivory containers, ivory-decorated furniture, and bronze horse trappings. The empire created other networks by transferring objects (and artisans) in Assyrian and other styles both within the empire and beyond its frontiers, promoting “intercultural” or “transnational” styles in banqueting equipment, personal ornament, and ceremonial weapons. Many portable items made of valuable materials, such as metal animal-headed drinking cups (Fig. 5) and elaborately decorated ivory furniture, were in fact widely distributed in southwest Asia by the late eighth century BCE as a result of multiple production centers and Assyrian court practices of appropriation and gift-giving.²⁷ Together with deportations of conquered peoples often far from their homelands, the movement and reception of objects fashioned in previously regionally based styles effectively reconfigured cultural space and remapped cultural boundaries throughout much of southwest Asia, further dissolving links between craft traditions and geographically defined or localized production centers. As far we can determine, few of the kinds of objects of Near Eastern manufacture recovered from Greek sanctuaries or tombs ordinarily circulated through commercial networks. Instead, their transfer was both highly restricted and intimately associated with Assyrian imperial ideology and the “Assyrianization” of lands under Assyrian control. It was with this Assyrianized world that Greeks interacted in Cyprus and along the eastern Mediterranean coast in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE.

Conclusion

This perspective represents a dramatic departure from the models initially developed in the nineteenth century, with their static, unproblematic categories of “Greek” and “Oriental.” Rather than blurring the distinction between them, as some recent scholarship has proposed, approaches emphasizing the historical framework within which many Greeks interacted with Egypt and the Near East in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE hold considerable promise for productively reassessing cultural and especially artistic exchange. Further investigation of these encounters within specific

²⁷ Curtis 1996: 171–73, 180; Curtis 2000; Ebbinghaus 2008; Gunter 2009: 34–40.

regional and local contexts both within the Aegean and along the eastern Mediterranean littoral would usefully elaborate particular circumstances of reception and response, which have emerged as mutable and highly complex. How did the empire's reconfiguration of cultural space and geographically defined production centers renegotiate the relationship between material culture and identity? What precisely was the political and cultural reach of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and how did it affect those regions that lay beyond its frontiers? Such questions are surely central both to specialists in the art of the ancient Near East and those concerned chiefly with neighboring cultural spheres in the Iron Age Mediterranean world.

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II. Technologies and Practices of Artistic Production

Silvana Di Paolo

The Historiography of the Concept of “Workshop” in Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology: Descriptive Models and Theoretical Approaches (Anthropology vs. Art History)

Abstract: The study of craft production has emerged as one of the most important, although problematic, issues in archaeological research. Organization, role, location, and meaning of workshops have been examined through a variety of interpretive models adopted by scholars. Through a historiographic analysis, this contribution surveys the different hypotheses that have been formulated in archaeology and art history: this double focus allows for moving between different scales of analysis ranging from the concept of household production to regionally based production. In particular, in art history, traditional approaches concerning “artistic attribution” or “authorship” have been partially replaced by a new perspective, according to which the intrinsic meaning and content of artworks are now considered the most relevant thread of inquiry.

Keywords: craft production, workshop, models, theory, historiography

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Introduction

Within the last several decades, the study of craft production has emerged as one of the most important, although problematic, issues in archaeological research. Examination of specialized production, drawing on various disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological approaches, provides many insights concerning relationships between economic organization, social differentiation and political power. In this scholarly context, the concept of workshop, that is the place where specialized crafts are practiced, remains a little-discussed topic.

The simplest modern definition for a workshop is “a room, building etc. in which work especially manufacture is carried on” (Trumble *et al.* 2002: 3672). But in some cases the concept of workshop for the ancient Near East has been expanded to be considered somewhat like the Italian *bottega* in the Medieval and Renaissance periods (Indrio 1989: 61–70): a place of artistic and craft production where craftsmen were

also trained in a range of skills, with apprentices and pupils attached to experienced artisans.¹ Other scholars have questioned the possibility of a full understanding of the general mechanisms of craft production in the ancient Near East (Steinkeller 1996: 223; Moorey 1999: 2, 13). The organization of artisan activity and technical procedures adopted should ideally be recovered through written documents; however, the textual sources permit only very small-scale assessments concerning single cases or specific productions.

Thus, the organization, role, location, and meaning of workshops have been examined through a variety of interpretive models adopted by scholars. Through a historiographic analysis, this contribution examines the different hypotheses that have been formulated in archaeology and art history: this double focus is useful because it allows us to use different scales of analysis that range from household production (further explored by field archaeology with the support of anthropology and ethnography) to regionally based production (prevalent in art history).

Craft Production and Specialization

Craft production, including its related processes and technologies, has been studied extensively by archaeologists working with materials from different regions and time periods in the world. It is one of the central issues in archaeological research because its study provides insights into economic organization, social relations, and political power. As recently pointed out by Cathy Lynne Costin, there are three different ways in which the study of craft production has been linked to the sociopolitical organization (Costin 2007: 273–74): specialization is associated with the rise and development of complex societies (states); craft production is tied in with the creation and circulation of objects from makers to users; and craft production has a role in social and political relations (social meaning of craft objects). The second and third perspectives have been developed only in the last decades² as part of the critique of the first idea that craft specialization is the specific result of increasing social complexity together with the formation of hierarchies.

The subject has been a special focus of interest among those scholars studying the development of chiefdoms or the origin of the state. Different hypotheses on social change, especially those that explain how societies become more complex, have

¹ I cite here only more recent studies on this working hypothesis. This association has been supported or criticized using different arguments ranging from the perspective of political economy to the basic organization of workshops (work system, division of labor, etc.): Di Paolo 1996: 173–78; 2009: 133–54; Meijer 2010: 853–58.

² See, for example, some cases in which craft production becomes an economic and technological phenomenon (Pope and Pollock 1993: 227–65). Craft objects can also be considered markers of differences between individuals (Wattenmaker 1998a: 47–56; 1998b).

argued that the rise and expansion of craft specialization contributed to these developments, but they have not explained convincingly the role of specialized production in the economy of ancient societies (Hendon 2008: 1054). A point of debate thus remains relevant: whether craft specialization was a causal factor that helped to increase social differentiation and political centralization or whether it was a consequence of these fundamental changes.

V. Gordon Childe tried to integrate specialized production into his schema of the development of early cities and states in order to explain the “Urban Revolution” in southern Mesopotamia. For Childe (1936: 118), the rise of handicraft industries was a consequence of different factors resulting from the development of agriculture. He considered cities and their institutions necessary conditions for the expansion of full-time occupational specialization (Childe 1950, 1951).

Childe’s explanation remains a fundamental research topic for archaeologists interested in the origin and expansion of specialized production because it recognizes the economic processes involved in social changes. Thus, the presence or absence of craft specialization or the “degree” of development of artisanal activities has become a particularly important key to understanding the phenomena of political centralization and types of economic and social organization.³ But in more recent years, archaeological research has demonstrated that the emphasis on the causal relationship between product specialization and political administration is no longer sustainable. The idea that craft specialists, employed by the power elites, produce valued items differentiating themselves from the rest of the society, is debated.

In considering the relationships between those who make (producers) and those who control the objects produced (consumers often identified with power elites), two different kinds of craftsmen (attached and independent specialists) have been assumed according to a distinction first proposed by Earle (1981), although the idea of a strictly controlled crafts has been, for a long time, the dominant view. Attached craftsmen work for a patron, usually an individual or social group of high social status that exercises some degree of monopoly over the labor of the specialists, control over their products and provides support for their activities (raw materials, tools, food, housing, etc.). Independent specialists, in contrast, operate on their own account, relying on other mechanisms of exchange (their products in return for other goods).

The development of a specialized craft production independent of elites is documented in full urban communities, and even as far back as the late prehistoric societies. It has been hypothesized that at Tell Leilan IIb (c. 2300 BCE), for instance, fine-wares were mass-produced by independent specialists organized in non-centralized workshops, according to the evidence from Operation 4 (Stein and Blackman

³ Despite the fact that many of his theoretical ideas and interpretations have been profoundly modified, Childe’s work continues to be a stimulus for reflection and discussion (see, for example, Trigger 1980; Green 1999: 97–109). A review of Childe’s lesson in light of more recent research developments is represented by the volume edited by Bernard Wailes (1996).

1993; Stein *et al.* 1993). Here, within a non-elite sector of the ancient settlement, there was an organized and standardized “industry” of ceramics headed by independent specialists,⁴ a fact that argues against the exclusive elite control of goods produced, pot-making in this case.⁵ The hypothesis is that during the Early Bronze Age the social role of objects drastically changes: thus, while the production of goods needed to maintain political status and control, such as metals (used for weapons), was controlled by centralized institutions, the production of pottery was left to independent craftsmen (Stein and Blackman 1993: 54). Likewise, in the Ubaid period, at Tell Abada, a site in the Hamrin area, a specialized pot-making “industry” consisting of different and independent workshops was organized as a large-scale decentralized and specialized craft activity (Stein 1996: 28).

The picture that emerges from cases such as Tell Leilan, Tell Abada and Sarepta⁶, for example, is that of an independent activity, although with some adjustments. In the same way, K. Duistermaat (2007: 25) hypothesized that craft production at Tell Sabi Abyad was “relatively” independent: workshops were family-based⁷ and commanded by and under the protection of the *dunnu* administration.

The Relation Between General and Particular: Craft Specialization vs. Workshop

Archaeologists studying ancient craft organization tend to make a general distinction between household (domestic) production and workshop (specialized) production. This distinction is based on some more or less important variables according to the descriptive model adopted: the location of production, quantity of daily time taken to carry out craft activities and, related to this, the amount of goods produced (van der

⁴ This mode of production seems to correspond to the “centralized production” model hypothesized by Carla Sinopoli: a large-scale but isolated production headed by specialists without any direct involvement from the state organization. Studying the experiences of craft producers in medieval and early-modern south India, Sinopoli (2003: 252–94) created a tripartite typology to differentiate the modes of production according to the degree of elite management of production: administered production, centralized production and non-centralized production.

⁵ Piotr Steinkeller (1996: 248–49) also deduced from the written sources that, for instance, the activity of potters in the Ur III period was not dependent on the state administration but was conducted with a certain degree of autonomy.

⁶ At Sarepta more than fifteen pottery workshops dating from the Late Bronze to the Persian period were excavated. According to the archaeologists, the presence of these work areas, containing finished vessels, kilns and other installations, is evidence of large-scale production of containers for wine, olive oil (Anderson 1987: 41–66).

⁷ There is an oxymoron between workshop and household-based production, as the following discussion demonstrates.

Leeuw 1977: 70). Inherent in a household-based production model is also the assumption that craft activities occur in the spatial context of the domestic residence.⁸ This spatial location implies a number of things about the organization and relations of production. It is often a part-time system (it occurs during breaks in the agricultural work) or, if full-time, may involve other members of the family.⁹

A workshop is defined as an archaeological site, or a part of it, where specialized crafts are practiced, whether metals, pottery, ivories, etc. It is also indicated as an extra-household system (Costin 2007: 276), because the center of the craft activity is a building or a room specifically intended for this use (even if it imitates a house plan).

But, if the means for distinguishing domestic (household) contexts from non-domestic (extra-household) contexts (that is, a workshop) are generally based on the organization of the space in which production took place and the amount of the goods produced, the concept of workshop is more complex, because it includes a structured work system, where technological processes in making specific classes of objects often require training and the development of skills for the manipulation of raw materials. Workshop implies a certain size, unrelated personnel, for instance, not belonging to the same family (Costin 2007: 296), a standardized and specialized production (Di Paolo 2009: 142) and competition aimed at acquiring clientele (Cutler 1994: 67). Taking this into account, the existence of workshops in the ancient Near East has not yet been demonstrated.¹⁰ If the best kind of evidence is the association of tools, raw materials, waste products and unfinished objects,¹¹ in archaeological practice this identification often remains elusive due to issues of preservation and

8 Household economy, as archaeological evidence for change in domestic production and consumption, was studied by P. Wattenmaker in relation to the case of Kurban Höyük, a site on the Upper Euphrates dating to the later third millennium BCE. Through detailed study of household production of ceramics, stone tools, textiles and food production, she identified a complex production system characterized by self-sufficient structures but involved in specialized productions (Wattenmaker 1998b).

9 Ethnoarchaeology has offered some suggestions for research of ancient production systems and divisions of labor; a male head of household (the true craft specialist) relies on his wife and children to take care of certain aspects of the production processes (see Costin 2007: 284 with references). But the assumption of historical continuity of certain mechanisms must be viewed cautiously. In the Ur III period, for example, the production of cloth was a specialized industry and carried-out by women. State administration established weaving “industries” staffed by female slaves or semi-free women (Wright 1996: 91–95).

10 The use of more generic terms has been suggested, such as production locus or area (Costin 1991) or workplace (Moorey 1999: 16–17).

11 Large amounts of unfinished and unfired pottery, potters’ tools (two basalt potters’ wheels), and wasters provided excellent evidence for pottery production at Tell Sabi Abyad, located on the Balikh River in northern Syria and belonging to the westernmost province of the Late Bronze Age Middle Assyrian kingdom. A large pottery workshop was found in levels 5 and 6 (Duistermaat 2007: 21–25 and figs. 2–3; 2008).

excavation methodology.¹² Thus, the existence of workshops is founded on indirect data, for instance, the discovery of tools inside tombs, or on partial evidence, such as the case with some kilns whose function remains doubtful. Finished objects represent the best (and sometimes the only) archaeological evidence available to scholars for reconstructing the existence and organization of an ancient workshop and its work system.

Meijer (2010: 849–59), writing about the economy of the Syrian Late Bronze Age, suggests that, although our data derive from palace archives, the assumption that all industry was directed by a “palace economy” and by regular royal employees, is fundamentally wrong.¹³ The organization of seal-cutters in the Syrian Late Bronze Age and the work system of the proposed workshops are compared, by Meijer, to the situation seen in the Italian Renaissance, with the emergence of a “merchant patriariate” through a complex interrelationship between banking, trade and manufacturing. This fundamental economic basis led to the development of the Renaissance courts, founded on a balance between military power, intellectual culture, and religion. These courts, whether clerical or secular, attracted many industries supported by taxes, tributes and booty. Thus, as well as the Italian fifteenth century courts, Syrian Late Bronze Age city-states employed, according to Meijer, artisans who were not directly dependent on the palace, but who worked on their own account and could even enter into specific contracts with rulers’ enemies. This reconstruction (Meijer 2010: 859), specifically based on a political economy perspective, emphasizes that our perception of strictly controlled crafts is, perhaps, unrealistic, although the written information in the Late Bronze Age is very scanty. The analogy with the Renaissance period relies, in this case, on the sociopolitical role of the Near Eastern artisans, seen as organized and independent specialists working outside the palace and within rooms or buildings specifically made for this activity.

Because the identification and preservation of ancient crafting places are still problematic in archaeological practice, heuristic methods can be used to push the process of thinking about the issue of craft specialization. Thus, the proposed analogies with the artisans’ workshops in the Medieval and early Renaissance periods seem to provide useful working hypotheses concerning a work system. Taking into account finished objects, these “analogies” expand the debate to include two fundamental issues: 1) the institutional and social role of craftsmen; and 2) the conflation of the workshop model with its work organization.

12 There is also, however, a significant interpretive problem posed by the archaeological record. According to current models, large-scale mass production should be characterized by large waste and debitage concentrations, as well as by unfinished objects. But, as rightly noted by Feinman (1999: 83–84) massive debris can be also a chronological datum. It could thus be the “product” of different generations of separate households, as well as evidence of high intensity production.

13 This is in response to the traditional view that suggests a centrally “administrated” craft production: see, for instance Margueron 1979: 3–25; Heltzer 1996: 278–83.

Before the late Renaissance there was no distinction between the concepts of fine (major) and decorative (minor) arts. The lower status of the latter resulted from a prejudice born during the late Renaissance, when the roles of artists and artisans definitively change (see Thomason, this volume). When adopting this idea to explain analogies observed between fine arts (monumental sculpture, for instance) and decorative arts (ivories, glyptics, etc.) in Medieval/early Renaissance as well as in ancient Near Eastern art, the shared factors can be seen to be the result of a vertical/hierarchical transfer of the figurative repertoire of the major arts to the lesser ones or vice versa (Kantor 1956: 173; Winter 1989: 332) or that the dissemination of a style or motif follows a circular path from major to minor art, then from minor to major art (Di Paolo 2009: 142; in press). An excellent example is represented by the ivories of the first millennium BCE, characterized by subjects and styles which are to be found on different materials, such as stone and metal.¹⁴ This evidence suggests that artisans were independent even though in close contact,¹⁵ rather than grouped into highly structured, closed workshops in competition with each other.

The conflation of the workshop model and its corresponding work organization has been raised by some scholars who have emphasized the use of a deductive approach in establishing criteria for distinguishing the work of one or more workshops. A tendency can be seen to proceed backwards from the effect (for instance the adoption of a specific technique or style on a group of finished objects) to the cause (the production of a given workshop). Different groups of artifacts distinguished by iconography and style correspond, according to these methodological premises, to different workshops, producing artificial constructions, although justifiable as a taxonomic necessity (Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1985: 50; Di Paolo 2009: 141–42).

However, Near Eastern ivories are characterized by the absence of two traits peculiar to a workshop's work system: manufacture of specific object types and standardized production. The first trait refers to the creation of particular classes of objects (pyxides, combs, etc.) characterized by a choice of exclusive and distinctive subjects. As far as standardization is concerned, a workshop is distinguished by a normalization/codification of the size for groups of objects. During the 13th and 14th centuries CE, for instance, French and Italian workshops were characterized by serial

14 Shared factors observed between ivories and steatite artifacts are particularly instructive. This phenomenon is not limited to the ancient Near East, since it is also attested in the Byzantine era, when craftsmen worked simultaneously both materials (Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1985: 22).

15 Historically, a “diffused” repertoire and style might also have depended on the specific requests of purchasers or the intervention of middlemen whose task was to conduct the transactions between artisans and their clients. To take the example of the Gothic ivories, the circulation of a shared repertoire was entrusted to agents who functioned as intermediaries between producers (from whom they acquired the finished artifacts) and purchasers, spread throughout Europe. In seventeenth-century India, some categories of artifacts were produced for the upper classes only “to order”: this also encouraged self-preservation, both in the technology employed and in the *imagerie* adopted (Gupta 1970: 53).

production with fixed canons in terms of the shape of the objects. On the basis of specific requests of the purchasers/patrons, small sculptural groups, identical in shape, were also produced in varying sizes, that is, a work organization which recalls the structure of Renaissance workshops, particularly those of the applied arts (Wackernagel 1994: 356).

The adoption of a deductive method in establishing valid criteria for distinguishing groups of objects produced in one or more workshops is also the logical consequence of the need for an appropriate and coherent language when a large number of artifacts lacking a clear archaeological context must be classified (this aspect has been first outlined by Winter 1992: 135–41). The Nimrud ivories, for instance, represent an emblematic case. The use of a coherent terminology produced a substantial semantic shift of the terms adopted toward production mechanisms and work organization (Di Paolo 1996; 2009: 139–41). Thus, it has been suggested that groups of ivories, homogeneous in iconography and style were produced within a single workshop, whereas several workshops operating with similar criteria belong to the same city-based school or production region (Herrmann 1986: 12–16, 48; 1989: 95; 1992a: 2, 28; 1992b: 67–68). In this reconstruction, questions arise at the lower hierarchical level, that is, the possibility of distinguishing one workshop from another. It is unknown whether variations observed within a homogeneous group of objects are the result of one or more craftsmen (Winter 1992: 139). Georgina Herrmann suggests the existence of strictly controlled workshops (with attached artisans) characterized by a very complex work organization: a building in which many artisans operate, each one specialized in single phases of the production (Herrmann 2000: 274).

Hands, Style and Work Processes: A View from the Science of Connoisseurship

The art historian Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891) developed a particular method of connoisseurship for the study of Italian painting, identifying attribution through analysis of minute characteristics. This approach was influenced by the theories of scientific classification that Morelli had studied with the biologist Ignaz Döllinger. The method, employing identification of the “hands” of a painter (both literally and in the figurative sense of the characteristics of representation), became very popular; it was termed “scientific” art history in the 19th and early 20th centuries CE, in contrast to the German academic tradition that viewed art history essentially as a historical phenomenon. In fact, while the German approach ignored the individual, emphasizing concepts such as nationality and period, the Morellian method sought to establish scientifically the individuality of the artist, showing that idiosyncracies of an artist’s style are often revealed in the way s/he portrayed apparently unimportant details such as a lock of hair (Wollheim 1973: 177–201). The application of this method has

been linked in the first instance to the identification of homogeneous groupings of objects inside wider assemblages. It also later allowed for suppositions on the production processes of supposed workshops, often understood as strictly-controlled and closed structures characterized by a rigorous work organization.

In the case of the Nimrud ivories, the adoption of this method has been correlated, at the higher level of analysis, with the identification of workshops: from subtle gradations attributed to one or more craftsmen (a master aided by one or more apprentices) to a regional style that includes work done in several more or less loosely related localities. Groups of materials have been distinguished according to their iconography and style in the scholarship of, early on, Richard D. Barnett and, later, in the *Ivories from Nimrud* series published, among others, by Georgina Herrmann, opening a debate regarding the location of city-based workshops/production areas.¹⁶ Emphasis has been given to the iconographic and stylistic aspects, both through analysis of the sporadic findings of similar ivories in Syria, Anatolia, and Assyria, and by comparisons between stone monuments, ivory carving and metal-work; Barnett relied more heavily on the information in the Assyrian historical records.¹⁷

Many factors contribute to a personal style (each artisan/master has his/her own way of doing things), among which is the manner in which a work of art is executed. Thus, the observation and selection of specific features that reflect the identity of the artisan is largely subjective.

A different application of Morelli’s method can be discerned in the discussion of the Persepolis sculpture by Michael Roaf (1983). This study considers various aspects, from the process of carving to the principles of design, from the identification of the work of individual sculptors to the description of the chronological development of these sculptures. The investigation proceeds from the general to the particular, from the relatively objective to the more subjective aspects. Even before the publication of Roaf’s study, the analysis of sculptors’ marks based on the careful restoration work at

¹⁶ The hypothesis of a production area localized in the Damascus region (to which would be attributed the ivories from Arslan Tash, Khorsabad, Zincirli and Karkemish, as well as a part of the ivories from Samaria and Nimrud) was put forward by Winter (1981), taking up and broadening an insight of Watzinger. In recent years, the hypothesis of such an Intermediate/South Syrian tradition has been debated; Intermediate seems not a category but the overlapping edges of larger Phoenician and North Syrian groupings (Gansell *et al.* 2007; Wicke 2009).

¹⁷ Damascus (Watzinger 1933; Winter 1981); Zincirli (Barnett 1935; 1982; Herrmann 1974; Winter 1976a); Hama (Barnett 1957; 1982; Winter 1973); Samaria (Winter 1981); Sakçegözü, Kunalua (Barnett 1982); Karkemish (Winter 1976b; Barnett 1982; Winter 1983; not shared by Herrmann); Tell Halaf (Herrmann 1986, 1989; not shared by Winter). Proposals of identification of ivory workshops for the ‘Phoenician’ group are lacking. Until now, the hypotheses have examined only the borrowing of some motifs from the Egyptian repertoire (Winter 1976b: 6–7): a group of Nimrud ivories exhibit many common traits with pectorals coming from Tanis (eastern Nile Delta) and dating to the 21st–22nd dynasty (Ciafaloni 1992: 15).

Persepolis from 1965 to 1979 had shed light on the problem of “workshops” (Tilia 1968, 1972, 1978). Through the combination of three methods of analysis (a mathematical cluster analysis,¹⁸ an examination of the sculptors’ marks, and a stylistic analysis), Roaf (1983: 90–96) presents hypotheses on the structure of the stoneworking workshops, including their work method. In this case study, the identification of different sculptors was aided by the presence of sculptors’ marks on the reliefs, foundation tablets, column bases and capitals, and so on. According to Roaf, these marks were left by teams of sculptors to label the figures they carved, marking the limits of their work. Applying the three methods of analysis to the figures of the Apadana, Roaf concludes that the sculptors carved groups of neighboring figures and worked in teams led by a master artisan. This master carved most of the heads, while other members of the team worked on other parts of the figures or on other stages (a conclusion also suggested by the study of unfinished reliefs). Some small variations in the carving of the heads may be due to a different hand or to the work of an “inexperienced” assistant. Thus, it is probable that the master craftsman sometimes allowed his assistants to do the more skilled work in his place (Roaf 1983: 27).

The investigation showed that each façade was divided into two sections, each worked by a different team. A similar binary division is found in all sections of the Apadana; it can be paralleled at Pasargadae where the marks on the stone blocks fall in two different groups. Another relevant conclusion is that the same sculptors did not carve the same subject. They were carrying out the plan of the designer, so their experience of a particular motif was unimportant. These data have been confirmed also by written sources: some texts from the Treasury tablets refer to the size of groups of stone sculptors as varying between 18 and 151 workers. Despite being highly skilled labor, their salaries were comparable to those of other groups of workers at Persepolis (Roaf 1980: 65–74), showing that there was no distinction between stone sculptors and other artisans. A last relevant conclusion is that, although the Treasury and Fortification tablets enumerate groups of workers according to their nationality (which suggests that work groups were sometimes organized on an ethnic basis, perhaps for easier communication and to avoid interethnic tensions), this division is not reflected in the stylistic idiosyncracies of the stone sculptures. According to Roaf (1983: 92–93, 96), the particular nationalities of the sculptors played no part in the creation of the Persepolitan style: any foreign influences probably indicate the background of the designers.¹⁹

18 The success of Morelli’s method depends on the selection of features that reflect the identity of an artist, but the choice, in this case, is largely subjective. The adoption of “natural” groupings through the calculation of similarity indexes gives this analysis a character of objectivity compared to the studies of Greek vases and their painters of Beazley (Roaf 1983: 15).

19 The possibility that a group’s identity (*ethnos*) can be recognized through its visual culture has long been central to the art historical approach. Scholars have focused on style, motif and a certain “spirit” in the images. These characteristics have then been used to construct models of production. But the

The methodological “test” conducted on the Persepolis reliefs emphasizes that subjective observations that are basic to Morelli’s method should be superseded/augmented by more modern tools, such as ranked and clustered characteristics to suggest different hands and statistical techniques to formalize styles and workshops. These would help overcome the difficulty of finding significant relationships among hundreds or thousands of possible features by relying exclusively on visual and subjective observations (outlined by Winter 2005: 34). The significance of attributes, as well as their weight in the analysis and taxonomic rank, may be subject to a misreading. In recent years, the efficiency of computational methods to augment the intuitions of art historians or to refine groupings of objects has been adopted by other researchers, for instance, in the regional classification of the first millennium BCE ivories through an analysis of the anthropometric variations using quantitative methods rather than visual methods (Gansell *et al.* 2007: 484; Gansell 2009: 159, 162).²⁰

The Long Tradition of German Formalism: From “Conflicting” to Multi-faceted Productions

The fundamental work of one of the most important art historians writing in German, Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945), drew upon Hegel’s conception of art as an expression of *Zeitgeist*: Wölfflin emphasized the formal stylistic analysis of paintings, considering composition, color, subject matter, etc., as they were handled by the painters of a particular period and place. Through comparative analysis, Wölfflin established several classifying principles that were influential in the development of formalist analysis during the 20th century.

In *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1915) these principles are presented as being derived from a close empirical analysis of the contrasts between Renaissance and Baroque art. Wölfflin proposes five binary categories of form, the first term in each pair being the “Renaissance” moment and the second the “Baroque.” These were meant to provide general descriptive terms, which would capture the development of artistic vision during that time. They embodied a cycle that Wölfflin in theory saw being repeated through history. In this influential book, his categories are conceived as a set of five oppositions: linear vs. painterly, plane vs. recession, closed vs. open, multiplicity vs. unity, absolute vs. relative clarity.

boundaries of each group have been defined in subjective or in so-called “atmospheric” terms (for a recent discussion of these aspects see Gates 2002: 105–32).

20 Based on anthropometric studies on the art of other cultures and, specifically, the work of Guralnick, who undertook a project studying the proportions of archaic Greek sculpture, this new classification aimed to demonstrate that design is adapted to the dimensions and carving potential of the ivory and that proportional differences may reflect regional styles.

Over time, the interpretation and application of Wölfflin's theoretical approach has varied widely. For some, an understanding of an object's formal properties and the manner in which such properties might change in chronological sequences of like objects, have constituted sufficient information. For others, the formal transformations of the features seen in artworks have provided, by structural analogy, certain insights into the nature of a culture or a people. In such cases, the genealogy of forms corresponds to the genealogy of "spirit," either of an individual artist or of an entire society, ethnic group, nationality or people (the *Zeitgeist* in Hegelian philosophy). According to Formalist critics, all visual art has an intrinsic value determined by the artist's ability to achieve an aesthetic order and balance of certain elements, such as line and composition. Thus, art is not determined by the historical context or the artist's intentions, but rather by the artist's ability to use the formal elements to create a product that is balanced and aesthetically pleasing.

The history of ancient Near Eastern art criticism has been characterized also by the impact that this theoretical approach had on the German academic tradition. Formalism as a development of opposed concepts (static vs. dynamic, schematic vs. naturalistic, and so on) was developed in the fundamental studies of Anton Moortgat and his followers with particular reference to Syro-Mesopotamian art. The idea of a binary structure in art has been a significant tenet, particularly taking into account that it was often correlated, until World War II, with the two main ethnic groups inhabiting ancient Mesopotamia: Sumerians and Akkadians. In addition, these paratactic schemes have been conceived in qualitative terms (*naturalistisch* vs. *abstrakt*): for example, the evolution of art has been interpreted as a sequence *Naturnah-Naturfern* (see Hrouda 1971: 185–89; Karg 1984: 1–5).²¹

Attempts to reconstruct ancient Mesopotamian and Syrian craft production and regional workshops through the evidence derived from excavation have drawn upon the theoretical tenets of Formalism. Initial research interests were limited to sculpture in the round and relief (see, for instance, Orthmann 1971: 12–18), both considered according to sets of opposite and "conflicting" properties. In recent decades, glyptics have been investigated through the Formalist approach in order to distinguish specific products characterized by a greater or lesser degree of stylistic excellence. German scholars changed the traditional sets of oppositions with new antithetical terms: High-Official vs. Low-Popular, Modelled vs. Drilled style, etc. Formal analysis in conjunction with the study of archaeological contexts allowed proposals to be made identifying production areas/centers. These suggestions have yielded extremely fragmentary historical frameworks in which regional styles/products are also the expression of contemporary activity of different teams of craftsmen (workshops).

²¹ At the same time, starting from the first suggestions of Moortgat, this approach was applied also to compositional aspects always analyzed according to formal oppositions: *Geritzt/Modelliert*, *Allgemein/Differenziert*, etc. Two studies on this specific aspect that concern different media and chronology are von Wickede 1990; and Czichon 1992.

It is impossible to mention all the scholars or research based on this approach. Generally speaking, broad groupings of like objects are created according to chronological and stylistic criteria. Then, these homogeneous groups are distinguished in smaller productions characterized by specific subject matter and style. Geographic proximity of items selected for study is not a fundamental criterion. In most cases, one or more court styles (characterized by a delicate and high quality carving) is opposed to more cursive and stylized objects. This procedure, consisting of one or more steps, has, for example, led to the identification of city or region-based workshops for Middle Bronze Age glyptic: four manufacturing centers for Middle Bronze Age Syria (Aleppo, Mari, Qatna, Karkemish), while more “anonymous” production areas have been suggested for northern Mesopotamia, the Middle Euphrates, and western Syria (Otto 2000: 109–68). The many attempts to circumscribe specific craft productions also include some hypotheses concerning long-term phenomena, such as groups of “intercultural” products (Winckelmann 2005: 185–97), which are marked by a fixed canon of motifs, style and composition and characterized by a widespread distribution (Winckelmann 2009: 53–82).

“Reinventing” Panofsky’s Sequence: Primary and Secondary Criteria and Results

In an article published in 1922, Aby Warburg was the first to describe “the science of art history” as Iconology in reference to Italian Renaissance painting. His research challenged the critical approach of formalism: the artwork is a document with many meanings and the expression of a social memory (a vehicle of forms and images). Reprised by Erwin Panofsky, this approach was concerned, above all, with the meaning, subject matter, or content of works of art, in reaction to the emphasis placed on the formal properties of artifacts in the work of scholars like Wölfflin. According to Panofsky, the formal qualities are of secondary importance compared to other circumstantial factors of production or reception. Panofsky viewed the relationships between form and meaning as complex and multilayered. In his famous three-step sequence (pre-iconographical, iconographical, iconological levels), iconology and the study of cultural significance have come to be seen as a complement to stylistic analysis (a primary goal for formalist critics), as if a work of art were a composite object made of a perfect balance of non-verbal style and verbal meaning. The pre-iconographic level descriptions focus preferably on what appears most essential: elements of design in the image, primary subject matter and formal analysis. The basis of such recognitions is practical experience regulated by awareness of style. The second step is based on the relationship between motifs and concepts: the iconographic analysis is carried out by connecting the image to a known story or recognizable character. In the last, iconological step, one aims to interpret images that possess “symbolic” values and

are symptomatic of the times in which they were produced. This level of analysis is a product of “synthetic intuition” (familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind) and conditioned by personal psychology (Panofsky 1955: 26–54).

Application of this theoretical approach is still rare in studies of Near Eastern art (Taylor 2006: 4), which tend not to be concerned with the symbolic and allegorical meaning of images (the iconological level), but limited to an analysis of the relationships between images and texts (Winter 2000: 76–80; Onnis 2009). In the three studies presented below, Panofsky’s three-step sequence has not been completed; the iconological phase remains unexplored. If the applicability of Panofsky’s theory remains problematic, nevertheless a “loose” application of Panofsky’s interpretative sequence has produced some interesting research aimed at identifying ancient craft production centers.

To take one example of an analysis drawing on this approach, al-Gailani Werr (1986), studying seal impressions on dated tablets from the *naditu* archives of the temple of Shamash at Sippar, distinguishes two different workshops active in the town from the reign of Sin-muballit (1812–1793 BCE). From a combined analysis of iconography, style and technique, she identifies Workshop I and II (al-Gailani Werr 1988). Workshop I, easily recognizable by the refinement and elegance of the high quality of the engraving, is characterized by the representation of two separate offering or worship scenes of equal importance. The manner of engraving certain details (a consequence of the tools employed), and especially the stylization of the garments, is its peculiar trait: the flounced robe reserved for some human worshippers consists of triple undulating lines and wider lines separating the flounces from each other. In Workshop II, distinguished by the image of a nude priest with pail and sprinkler, which is totally absent from Workshop I, the stylization is more evident: the flounces are indicated by straight vertical lines separated into registers by unbroken horizontal lines (al-Gailani Werr 1986: 462–63).

In the same way, Collon (1982: 33–43) isolates the work of two different seal cutters operating in Syria in the 18th and 17th centuries BCE. Several cylinder seals carved in a royal workshop in Aleppo are related by subject matter (the smiting god is often represented), style and material. A second group of seals, probably originating in one workshop that Collon calls the Green Jasper Workshop, shows many compositional similarities: a combination of two or three figures, Egyptianizing filling motifs scattered throughout the field and the “segmented” way the animals are depicted (neck and body forming a single line – in the case of birds, the neck-line curves under the wing and body – with the haunch represented by a separate drill-hole). According to the distribution (Syria, Palestine, Cyprus, Crete) and subject matter of these seals, Collon (1986: 61–62) suggested that the workshop was situated in Byblos, a coastal site in close contact with Egypt.

The same seals have been reconsidered by Teissier (1996) and included in her Group C. She suggests that more than one workshop was probably responsible for their production, because she notes that these seals are stylistically and iconographi-

cally individual (Teissier 1996: 25). She hypothesizes the existence of different places of manufacture (Workshops A-E) specialized in working seals with Egyptianizing motifs and located in north Syria and the Levant during the Middle Bronze Age. Her analysis considers composition, style, subject matter (pre-iconographic level), then the filling motifs (type, position, etc.) and a general interpretation of figures and scenes (iconographic level). She concludes that the choice of Egyptian motifs indicates a deliberate selection incorporated as phenomena related to natural forces (Teissier 1996: 13–15). The location of workshops played an influential role in the incorporation of Egyptian motifs into the Syro-Levantine repertoire: all workshops, except B, made seals that did not include true Egyptian elements. The seals produced in Workshop B used Egyptian iconographic features such as kilts and double wings as part of its individual style (Teissier 1996: 25).

The Killing of the Master! Context and Meaning in a New Area of Debate: Semiotics

Investigations into the mechanisms of meaning under the name of semiotics have a long history in Western philosophy. It can be also said that the semiotic perspective has long been present in art history: the work of Alois Riegl and Erwin Panofsky can be shown to be congruent with the basic tenets of Charles S. Pierce and Ferdinand de Saussure, and key texts of Meyer Schapiro deal directly with issues in visual semiotics. But in the past three decades, semiotics has been engaged with a range of problems very different from those it began with; the encounter between semiotics and art history involves new and distinct areas of debate: the polysemy of meaning; the problematic of authorship; the concepts of context and reception (social and historical conditions out of which images emerged); and the issue of gender-biased theories, to mention just a few examples.

Within this method of approach and with particular reference to the innovative studies of Winter and her followers, concepts such as style, skill, workmanship, and workshop, are also considered as the expression of a strategy of manipulation: where this strategy is more evident, it is possible to correlate artistic programs with political and ideological projects. Furthermore, there are also important reappraisals that outline the potential “polyvalence” of images and the possibility that they are stylistically variable or differently worked in diverse sub-spheres of society (political, religious, social). Degrees of quality of carving can be linked to the identity and role of the patrons (different members of the power elite), their personal taste or biography.

Where differences of style, quality and competence in the carving of a cycle of sculptures or sets of objects are clearly discernible (workshop is, by definition, the place of the specialized production with many artisans and a range of skills), they

are interpreted as the intentional deployment of variously skilled craftsmen in order to enhance certain ideological effects, according to the plans of the patrons. The making of things becomes an instrumental action – it influences the thoughts and actions of others. When compared with theories of art that embrace a passive point of view, such as Formalism or Connoisseurship, semiotics attributes a more active role to worked objects: they embody complex intentionalities and mediate social agency.

A recent discussion of the lion hunt reliefs in Room C of the North Palace at Nineveh demonstrates that the quality of workmanship and the dichotomy of master-apprentice seem directly correlated to the physical and social distance from the king Assurbanipal (Aker 2007). Focusing attention on three aspects of workmanship (carving, embellishment of forms, and competence), Aker shows that the lion hunt reliefs of Room C in Assurbanipal's palace do not display the same level of carving. The best-carved areas depicted the king, while the poorly carved zones included primarily lower-ranked figures. Various degrees of quality of carving and competence (distinguished by presence/absence of mistakes, unfinished parts, etc.) and elaboration of details combine to articulate a hierarchy of status among the figures represented (Aker 2007: 240). Thus, the amount of skill devoted to the carving is distributed but, above all, "regulated," because it is used by the planners as a visual tool for communicating meaning and for confirming rank and social status. The marginalization of some individuals (including high ranking officials) is emphasized by mediocre workmanship, while honor is reserved for the king as well as middle ranking officials through excellent carving. There is, according to Aker (2007: 243), a strategy of patronage by which Assurbanipal tried to ensure the loyalty of the middle and low ranking members of his court.

Scholarship has traditionally been built around the notion of context, thought of in terms of authorship or historical milieu. In our discipline, authorship does not refer to the name of a particular individual making things (artworks); it is, rather, a descriptive term referring to a whole range of qualities (style, specific subjects and features, etc.). The first procedure in attribution is to secure clear evidence of the material traces of the "authors" in the work. The traces may be directly autobiographic (evidence of a particular hand at work) or they may be visible only through physical traces of a historical, chronological or artistic milieu. In traditional art historical approaches, the context (the social and historical conditions out of which images emerge) is understood to be a given entity that determines the meaning of the artworks. In a semiotic perspective, however, context is not a given but is produced; the artwork is itself a "text" consisting of signs that require interpretation (Bal and Bryson 1991: 270). Thus, artworks must be investigated by identifying "signals" emitted by the authors/craftsmen and understood by multiple viewers. The multiplicity of possible experiences is emphasized at the expense of a single clearly delineated viewing. Then, the identification of the places of manufacture of worked objects and the "identity" of their producers need no longer be the main objective.

Feldman (2002: 6–29; 2006), for instance, in analyzing the Late Bronze Age luxury items circulating in the Near East and Mediterranean (including vessels, weapons, ivories, etc.), advocates a contextual method and interprets these works of art as bearers of social and historical memory. Taking into account the precious objects produced as diplomatic gifts, exchanged among the ruling elites and widely distributed in the ancient Mediterranean (Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Syria, mainland Greece and the Aegean islands), she outlines their hybrid imagery (Feldman 2006: 10): with the absence of elements belonging to one established tradition, these luxury items lose their narrative force, which Feldman interprets as a conscious choice in favor of a “visual hybridity.” In introducing the cultural analogue of the Euro banknotes, with their rejection of elements belonging to individual countries and their featuring instead a very visual synthesis that expresses the cultural and economic unity of Europe, Feldman (2006: 11) suggests a comparison with the Late Bronze Age art’s “hybrid motifs.” In general, their social and political role, highlighted by a complete hybridization “such that no one ‘foreign’ culture can be said to predominate” (Feldman 2006: 25–30), has been analyzed despite ongoing questions of origin and stylistic development (such as their place of production).

In such studies, the difficulty of identifying centers or areas of production is no longer an overriding issue for contemporary research. Feldman, for example, attempts to shift scholarly attention from inquiries into artistic attribution or issues of patronage arguing that the meaning of the iconographic repertoire (characterized by animal attacks and animals in vegetation in the Late Bronze Age) becomes the most relevant thread of inquiry. Feldman defends the semantic integrity of the *koiné* imagery against tendencies that see it as “a meaningless mixing of unrelated motival elements” (Feldman 2006: 87).

The two case studies presented here (reliefs cycle of Assurbanipal and Late Bronze Age luxury diplomatic gifts) do not cover the full range of art historical inquiries that, in recent decades, have focused on the craft production of the ancient Near East. They are, however, paradigmatic because they represent two complementary tendencies to assimilate the old scholarly literature and research approaches. The first one attempts to “integrate” traditional aspects of connoisseurship and its relevance in determining such issues as chronology and authorship within the new boundaries of semiotics. This “mixed method” is useful when research concerns a series of homogeneous or chronologically related artworks. On the other hand, this integration can be considered unnecessary or, even dangerous, when the object of study is represented by much more geographically dispersed artworks made from different materials (gold, ivory, stone, etc.), as in the second case.

The use of formal and stylistic clues to reconstruct an individual or regional “identity” has also been deemphasized in recent years. The interpretation of “connoisseurship as fetishism” (a phrase coined by Jacques Derrida) produced a neglect of stylistic analysis in historiography, although in a recent discussion on this subject

(Neer 2005: 1–10) attention has shifted from determining origin (person or place) of the objects to a more extended concept of “proximity”: artifacts are proximate to each other by physical contiguity (by find-spot) prior to be associated according to subjective, stylistic criteria.

But that is another story.

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Allison Karmel Thomason

The Impact of the “Portable”: Integrating “Minor Arts” into the Ancient Near Eastern Canon

Abstract: This study of the “minor arts” begins with an interrogation of the use of the words “minor” and “craft” as applied to works produced and consumed in the ancient Near East. I critique the dichotomies of major vs. minor arts or art vs. craft that are embedded in and drive art historical thought about modern and Western objects, with its focus on singularity and originality in the age of mass production. This historiographic grounding and critique of the phrase “minor arts” will argue for the use of the phrase “portable objects/works of art” as preferable for students of the ancient Near East. Such a phrase allows a fuller understanding of the value (political, economic, social) and significance of small-scale objects in the ancient Near East, including those that are attested only pictorially if not archaeologically, such as textiles. The study discusses the current state of work on portable art in light of the concepts of agency and identity and the meaning and affect of objects in the ancient Mesopotamian world.

Keywords: material culture, minor arts, decorative arts, ivory, textiles, canon, monumental art, dress, adornment

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Introduction

Decorative, monumental, ornamental, major, minor, high, low, fine, applied, plastic, art, craft: all of these terms have been used in the English language to describe objects created by civilizations. There is no question that artists of the past created works of art/objects¹ in different forms, scales, and materials. From the ancient Near East, we have stone sculpture from colossal to miniature in scale and we have a number of objects made out of a variety of materials including metal, ivory, wood, semi-precious stones, hard stones, glass, textiles, wicker/basketry, fur, and eggshell – many of which were portable by a single person, but some of which were larger in scale and therefore fixed in a single station or moved with great effort.

¹ I shall use the two phrases interchangeably here, with the proviso that “objects” is a much broader and more inclusive term than “works of art.”

The terms “monumental” or “major” are often used by scholars of ancient Near Eastern art to describe non-portable works of art carved in stone. The term “minor” implies that works of art that lack fixed stations and were small in scale had a less significant visual, intellectual, or emotional impact on ancient viewers. In a similar manner, the art historical tendency to separate “works of art” from “craft objects” implies that they were created with a different purpose and intention. Since the late nineteenth century, art historians have concluded that “works of art” derive from a more “conceptually and intellectually centered activity” than do crafts (Risatti 2007: 2). For example, Collingwood, an influential art historian, argued that major or fine arts lack physical practicality and require more critical attention than crafts because they are products of a creative spirit that erupts from the genius-artist (Janaway 1992). By adding the qualitative adjectives “major” or “fine,” scholars confer upon certain objects an elevated status for a variety of reasons. Ultimately, the dichotomous phrasing that art historians employ implies that the ancient viewer and the modern art historian should direct more of their scholarly attention to those objects deemed “fine” or “major works of art,” and only secondarily consider “minor” objects or “crafts.”

My effort here is aimed at exposing how our use of the terms “major art” and “minor art” (and their synonymous pairs) are modern Western conceptions that require interrogation. I argue that art historians studying the ancient Near East should banish these and other related terms such as “decorative,” “ornamental,” or “applied” from their working vocabularies, as they were unknown in the ancient Near Eastern world and elided often in the canons established by art historians. At the same time, I understand that dichotomies in phraseology are unavoidable and can even be helpful to modern art historians when constructed with less modern bias (Risatti 2007). Therefore, I argue that the terms “portable” and “non-portable” might be more appropriate vocabulary choices, as they are less value-laden and more illustrative of the choices and behaviors humans make when producing and consuming objects. This category of portable objects could include: seals and amulets, plaques and figurines, cultic paraphernalia, weapons and utensils, jewelry and objects of adornment, cosmetic and grooming items, furnishings and vessels, and horse trappings.² Equally as important as the more durable materials, however, the viewer of an object could derive satisfaction through visual as well as other sensory experiences, such as oral, aural, or tactile. Therefore, I argue that portable artworks should also include textiles and clothing or utensils made of leather, furs, or animals skins. A survey of recent scholarship shows that portable works of art, while initially less important in ancient Near Eastern art historical canons, have grown in prominence in the last thirty years, receiving a good deal more art historical attention than

² Creating an exhaustive list of excavated portable objects is difficult in short space, but Moorey (1999) provides an extensive and systematic listing and discussion.

in the formative years of the field due to the influence of new archaeological and anthropological approaches. Indeed, the state of the field is promising for the study of portable works of art in the ancient Near East.

The Legacy We Inherited: A Brief History of Categorizing the Arts in the West

An urge to classify works of art, though not an exclusive prerogative of modern Western art historical scholarship, has been present since the Greek Classical period.³ Our Western art historical understanding of art as being divided into “major” and “minor” works stems from a legacy of Greek debates about the characteristics of art and beauty, or aesthetics. The concept of categorizing works of art into “major” and “minor” and the application of relative status or conditions of beauty to them is a more recent phenomenon. In fact, portable and non-portable works of art have not always been considered aesthetically separate. For instance, the early Greek philosophers thought of art (Greek τέχνη, Latin *ars*) in the Platonic way as all work produced according to rational rules. The Aristotelian school furthered this concept by understanding τέχνη as any object that required knowledge to produce (Tatarkiewicz 1963: 231; Kristeller 1951; Shiner 2001: 19). The τέχνη that were imitative of nature – such as tricks with mirrors, sculpture, and painting – were derogatorily recognized as those that were cultivated for pleasure alone, contrasting τέχνη with pure beauty. Following on the principle that some arts were morally and aesthetically preferable to others, the Hellenistic philosopher Galen distinguished between vulgar (“servile”) and liberal arts, in which vulgar arts required physical labor in their creation, reflecting the Greek privileging of “activities of the mind” (Tatarkiewicz 1963: 232; Kristeller 1951: 504; Shiner 2001: 22). Arts of the mind, rather than those performed with physical labor or for pay, “liberated” the aristocratic Greek from a servile existence.

In the European Middle Ages, the concept of liberal arts – activities of the mind, which produce knowledge – both broadened and modified the Greek notion of the separation of form and function, beauty and practical utility. Arts were separated also according to their ability to “give pleasure” or elicit a non-physical – emotional, intellectual, spiritual – experience in the viewer (Risatti 2007: 25). The visual arts of sculpture, painting and architecture were segregated from others inspired by the Muses of Classical mythology or incorporated into the Medieval categorization of the Trivium and Quadrivium, which comprise the seven liberal arts (T=grammar, rhetoric, dialectic; Q=arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) (Kristeller 1951: 507).

³ For thorough discussions of the categorization of different types of art, see Frank 2000, Shiner 2001, and Risatti 2007.

Returning to the ancient Greek idea of all knowledge as art, a concurrent recognition of the “mechanical arts,” including architecture, sculpture and painting, also emerged in the Medieval period. These visual arts were considered along with the liberal arts as relevant human activities, even if they were taught within guilds and not the newly founded European universities. In the Italian Renaissance, and particularly in Alberti’s painterly Florence, a concept of “fine arts” (*arti del disegno*) emerged, elevating only three genres of mechanical arts – sculpture, architecture, and painting – and endowing them with equal status in the human endeavor to science, poetry, and music, all part of the original seven liberal arts. A concept of painting, sculpture, and architecture as “fine art” is, therefore, an Italian Renaissance idea (Kristeller 1951: 497–514).

These debates about what constitutes art and beauty (*les beaux arts*) continued to appear in the Enlightenment encyclopedias of the *philosophes*, which attempted to taxonomize all knowledge created and considered by man. In the *Encyclopédie* of 1751, Diderot’s central concern related to the visual arts returned to Platonic debates about the purity of beauty, whether beauty excluded any form of utility, and whether those arts not considered “fine” or deemed useful could still be beautiful (Frank 2000: 140). The first modern art historical scholarship of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century arrived on this philosophical scene where the status of visual art was no longer debatable. Instead, what constituted the “finest” or most important and beautiful forms of visual arts – which should attract the critical attention of the newly professionalized art historians – was highly contested. In this formative phase of art history, driven by Winckelmann’s notions of artistic development, all visual arts that were not painting, sculpture, or architecture were relegated to the “minor” realm and received little scholarly attention. The notion of small-scale, portable works of art as being merely “decorative” and not functional, or “applied” rather than intrinsically part of the object, arose only in the last century in debates about art. By the late nineteenth century, Alois Riegl, a curator of textiles in Vienna, is credited with re-inserting the non-*beaux arts* into the realm of art historical consideration as he entered into a debate with Gottfried Semper about whether those mechanical arts that were not part of the fine arts could be considered beautiful, useful, or both. Riegl argued for the application of his concept of *Kunstwollen*, or artistic volition, to all forms of art, high and low, thus reinvigorating, if only for a brief period, interest in “minor arts.”⁴

At the same time as Riegl and other art historians were debating the nature of art, cultural critics, architects, and designers were also discussing the nature of beauty in

4 Jespersen (2008: 143) observes that Riegl, influenced by Wolfflin’s formalism, is known for restoring late antique “ornament” and Islamic arabesque to the art historical canon from which they had been banished as meaningless by Winckelmann and other pioneers in the field, who placed fifth century Greek sculpture at the apex of cultural achievement. See also Alex Potts’ (1994) discussion of Winckelmann’s influence and Winter’s (1998) discussion of Riegl’s notion of style.

consideration of what they termed “decorative arts.” Artists and critics such as John Ruskin, William Morris, and Le Corbusier were especially captivated with how to combine utility and beauty in architecture, and whether decoration *applied to* objects rather than intrinsically part of the object, from buildings to spoons, was necessary or noble (Risatti 2007: 19). Out of this debate, the relative status of minor arts and all form of decoration, including painting and sculpture, sunk to its lowest level. The famous declaration by Adolf Loos (2000) in a 1908 treatise entitled “Ornament and Crime” that all ornament is “unaesthetic” thrust the minor arts out of any consideration of beauty, and the study of portable art turned to craft or “handicrafts.” Critics and designers interested in craftsmanship championed works made by hand, the nobility of workmanship in their creation, and their value relative to “art” as commodities in a market (Risatti 2007; Morris 2000; Becker 1978). Thus portable works of art were segregated from large-scale artworks to the realm of “craft,” with a strong focus on production and utility. The anti-decoration movement was a reaction against the increasingly common mechanized production of artistic and architectural elements and part of the Socialist critique of the loss of “connection” – that is authenticity and originality – that accompanied mass production (Loos 2000; Benjamin 1936). It is these art historical forays into portable works of art that heavily influenced scholars working on objects from the ancient Near East during the formative phases of art historical scholarship of the modern era.

Mesopotamian Concepts of “Art”

In general, most ancient Near Eastern cultures lack a word for “art.” In Akkadian, the word *šalmu* (Sumerian *alan* or *an.dul3*), often translated as “image,” most closely resembles the idea of an object created by humans to resemble something real or imagined (Bahrani 2001; Ross 2005: 331). The Mesopotamians did, however, have their own notions of beauty and taxonomic urges to categorize objects qualitatively, as has been discussed in numerous venues by Irene Winter (1994, 1995, 1999, 2003), Zainab Bahrani (2001, 2003) and most recently by Feldman (2005). In Mesopotamia, a distinction between beauty and utility was never present; rather, all objects possessed the potential to be qualitatively superior or inferior, important or not. While there is a lack of self-conscious discussion of the noun “art” in texts from Mesopotamia (for which we have the most written information in the Near East), there are numerous adjectival terms in Akkadian that describe objects. The relative importance of objects was determined either by the quality of workmanship that went into their making or their ability to elicit a response in – to affect – a viewer. Therefore, the most valued objects in the Mesopotamian world were understood as highly functional, reaching out beyond their physical space to elicit a response in a viewer. The affective qualities of a colossal bas-relief were not necessarily categorized differently or considered less important than those of a small, movable statue or ivory bed. Scale, technique,

material or subject did not determine affectiveness or well-madeness, the closest we can come to a Mesopotamian concept of “art” or “beauty” – that is, which types of objects matter most, or most deserve human productive or consumptive human attention.⁵ Thus cylinder seals, inlaid boxes, and jewelry – all considered “minor arts” in traditional modern canons – were considered equally affective and beautiful if they contained the same qualities as other objects. The scale, uniqueness of the object or its clarity of detail or narrative are therefore only modern conceptions of what makes a work of art “major” or “minor.”

Tracing the Treatment of “Minor Arts” in the Art Historical Canon

Even if the recent text-based studies on Mesopotamian aesthetics were not available until several decades later in the twentieth century, Riegl and his contemporaries debating the beauty of decorative arts were fortunate to have had newly excavated artifacts from Egypt and Mesopotamia at their disposal to study. Since the rediscovery of large-scale and small scale works of art through early archaeological excavations of the mid-nineteenth century, scholars have considered the relative artistic qualities of works of art in the ancient Near East (Feldman 2005: 304). However, the earliest comprehensive canonical surveys of ancient Near Eastern art would wait another half century to appear and when they were published, they fit squarely within the realm of traditional art history, which focused on “major arts.” The treatment of three groups of portable objects in particular, cylinder seals and their impressions, gold jewelry from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, and lapis, shell and stone mosaic inlay from southern Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic period, are helpful lenses through which we can view the canonical approach to portable objects in ancient Near Eastern art history.

Henri Frankfort’s *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, which first appeared in 1954, marks the beginning of the systematic attempt to categorize ancient Near Eastern art in time and space, a task that art historians of painting and architecture had begun much earlier for other ancient civilizations, especially Greek and Roman antiquity. Architecture and sculpture (in-the-round and in relief) took center stage in Frankfort’s opus, as the chapter organization demonstrates. The book is organized diachronically by archaeological period and region, and within each chapter hierarchically according to scale, technique and material: “Architecture,” “Applied

5 This characteristic is unlike Egyptian art, since in Mesopotamia only rarely did the relative scale of individual figures within a single work of art imply greater importance. For example, in the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin (Winter 1996: 21; Ross 2005: 339), where Naram-Sin is taller and more muscular than the soldiers of his army.

Sculpture and Relief," "Sculpture in-the-round," "Common Relief" (ceramic or terracotta), "Cylinder Seals," and if deemed significant in some way – as in the chapter on Late Assyrian art – "Applied Arts." Frankfort's training and experience in archaeological fieldwork (he worked in the Diyala region of Mesopotamia) insured that some portable works of art were incorporated into the discussion, as he frequently compared iconographic and stylistic treatment across several different materials and sizes. Frankfort's publications focusing on cylinder seals (1939, 1955) certainly demonstrated his refusal to jettison portable arts from the canon; however, he was more concerned in these publications with the use of seals to refine archaeological chronology and periodization than in their inherent aesthetic merit. This interest in the chronological value of seals would continue to influence scholars for decades.

Similarly, one of Frankfort's central concerns was the relative placement of ancient Near Eastern art in relation to Greek and Roman art. Such a consideration, according to Frankfort (1954: 18), "required a very full treatment of the minor arts," as the objects from the ancient Near East, he implied, could compare (or compete) favorably, in aesthetic and technical terms, with those of the Classical civilizations. In reading the narrative of the survey, one quickly becomes aware of a Rieglian turn in Frankfort's analysis, as he included within the canon objects that somehow demonstrated ingeniousness, uniqueness, or elaboration – the unstated *Kunstwollen* – whatever their scale or material. Despite this recognition, the first jewelry that materializes in Frankfort's canon are a necklace and headdress from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (1954: fig. 68), which make their appearance in the form of photographs alone, with no narrative description (Fig. 1). In contrast to jewelry and following on his earlier work, the art of cylinder seals, termed glyptic art, received a great deal of attention in Frankfort's canon. Frankfort (1954: 37) asserts that the refinement and development of narrative art in early Mesopotamia depended not on large-scale paintings or reliefs, but "on the compositions of seal engravers" who developed "the ingenuity of narrative art... [and whose seals]... disclose most fully the richness and vigour". The further one travels in his narrative, and in spite of his proposed organizational schema, "major" and "minor" works are elided by Frankfort and juxtaposed as exemplars of fine ancient Near Eastern art, rather than treated separately, especially in the wake of a paucity of large-scale works carved in stone. For example, due to a relative lack of stone reliefs, Frankfort (1954: 141) declares (ironically) that for the Middle Assyrian period, "the only monuments which adequately reveal the astonishing vitality and power of the period are the seal designs."

In addition, objects of similar material and scale are conferred differing status within the canon depending upon Frankfort's valuation of their subject matter or style. While Frankfort includes some portable objects, the organization and structure of his narrative emphasizes non-portable works. He includes portable objects only in the absence of "major works," or if they exhibit *uniqueness*, a condition that he also required in the major works of art that comprise his canon. For example, a small and



Figure 1: Jewelry from the grave of Queen Pu-abi from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, Early Dynastic period, as illustrated in Frankfort 1996: 64.

unique portable metal offering stand with two wrestlers, part of the temple furniture from Tell Agrab of the Early Dynastic period (Fig. 2), is considered an “ingenious and elaborate” work of art (Frankfort 1954: 55). Its ingeniousness lay for Frankfort (1954: 61) in its uniqueness and degree of detail. Later in the chapter, he discusses two hammered copper lion heads of similar size and material, which are not unique, because they were used “ornamentally” and applied to a wooden sledge. Or, the so-called “Standard of Ur” is characterized by “uniqueness and clarity” (Frankfort 1954: 91), while ceramic plaques and figurines of the Old Babylonian period, which are not unique, “lack all pretense of art” and are of “indifferent quality” (Frankfort 1954: 114).

Frankfort’s survey, written in English and published in both hardback and paperback, is probably the most affordable and widely circulated survey of ancient Near Eastern art in the English-speaking world to this day; it is still in print in its fifth edition (1996). It was soon followed by two surveys that are seminal, if less accessible to a general audience; they were initially written in German and then translated into English. Eva Strommenger wrote *5,000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia* (Hirmer, 1962 German; Abrams, 1964 English) as a direct response to Frankfort’s *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Strommenger 1964: 7). Strommenger’s text appeared a few years before that of her mentor, Anton Moortgat, who in 1967 published his own survey, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia: The Classical Art of the Near East* (English version: 1969). Both of these surveys obviously eschewed Frankfort’s broader geographical approach but included some works from outside of the Mesopotamian heartland that were either found there or related to it in style or



Figure 2: Copper cultic stand from Tell Agrab, Early Dynastic period, as illustrated in Frankfort 1996: 54.

iconography.⁶ These two books have some similarities, especially in the size of the photographs produced and the attention to glyptic art. However, other than these superficial parallels, they differ vastly. Strommenger’s (1964: 8) narrative is perfunctory and the bulk of her book is taken up by excellent photographs and catalog descriptions, as if she were putting together an imaginary museum exhibit that contained the “masterpieces of all epochs.” The work is organized chronologically and further sub-divided into sections on “architecture” and “works of art” for each time period. Her “works of art” sections begin with large-scale works in stone and small-scale glyptic art and conclude with portable objects in metal and terracotta. Like Frankfort, Strommenger held glyptic art in high regard because it was “artistically exciting” (Strommenger 1964: 8) and showed “artistic creativeness” (Strommenger 1964: 2). For the most part, however, to Strommenger (1964: 11), ancient Near Eastern art lacked originality and exhibited an “urge to irradiate the surrounding world with as many stereotyped pictorial ideas as possible [where] there is no room for individual impulses and problems, nor for human relations.” Strommenger’s Cold War rhetoric reflects in a more politically charged way Frankfort’s comments about uniqueness and originality in works of art. Mosaic inlay on statues particularly perplexed Strommenger (1964: 23) as “ornamental decoration [which had] no logical association with the object itself.” (Figs. 3 and 4) As with Frankfort, works of jewelry from the Royal Cemetery of Ur are pictured and catalogued separately, but mentioned only briefly as a group in the narrative (Strommenger 1964: 30).

⁶ For example, Strommenger’s (1964: 454–55) inclusion of some first millennium BCE Levantine ivories found at Nimrud or Moortgat’s (1969: 110) discussion of portable art from second millennium BCE Ugarit.

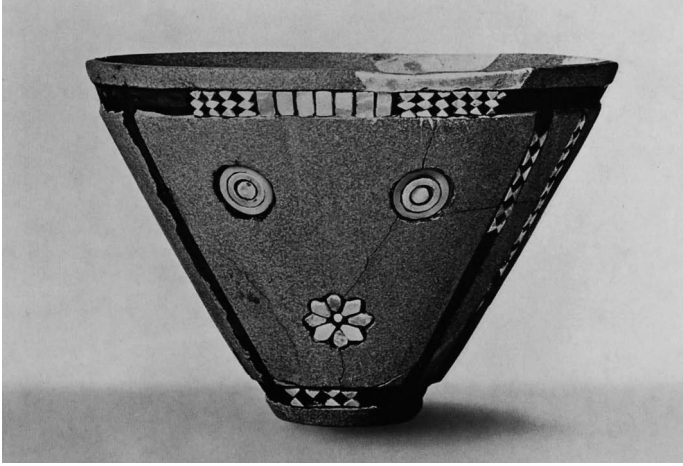


Figure 3: Stone vessel with shell, lapis and carnelian inlay from Khafajeh, Early Dynastic period, as illustrated in Strommenger 1964: pl. VI.

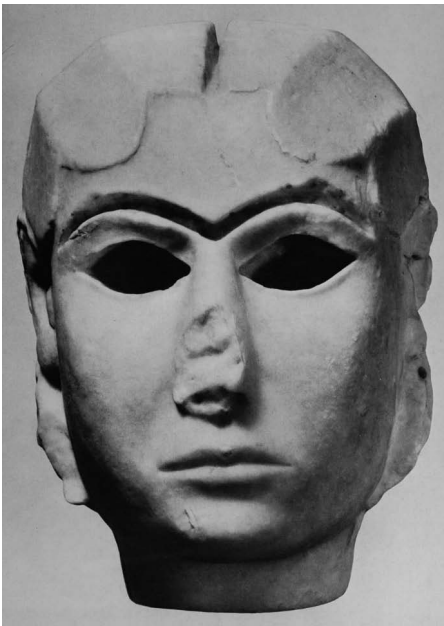


Figure 4: Stone head of a woman from Uruk, with inlay missing, Uruk Period, as illustrated in Strommenger 1964, pl. 31.

Departing slightly from Frankfort, Strommenger defined a true work of art most emphatically by its uniqueness *and* political relevance – its ability to be connected to a historical event or person. Portable objects such as cylinder seals and ivories were included in Strommenger’s canon if they exhibited uniqueness, creativity, or – most importantly – political associations. For instance, she writes that the macehead of

King Mesilim from the Early Dynastic period is “important for the history of Mesopotamian art [because it] connects a distinct style with an historical phase” (Strommenger 1964: 392). This statement exposes Strommenger’s stated aim, as she intended to pass beyond Frankfort’s stylistic and iconographic discussions in order to pin the stylistic development of Mesopotamian art specifically to political chronology. Thus any object – large or small – that could be connected with a specific historical personage by inscription or associated inscribed finds was given prominence in her canon. Regardless of her aims and analysis, Strommenger’s catalogue managed to bring the “minor” works of art that were illustrated to the foreground in the full-page black-and-white and color photographs produced by her son, Max Hirmer. Strommenger’s use of such large illustrations in fact served to elide the scale of the works even more than did the relatively small intra-narrative illustrations from Frankfort and Moortgat.⁷

Moortgat’s narrative is thicker with description and certainly with analysis. Caught up in the racial politics of his day perhaps more than other scholars, his central aim was to demonstrate how art is “deeply rooted in racial attitudes about life, gods, and kings” (Moortgat 1969: 9). As for his approach to different scales and materials, like Strommenger and Frankfort, small-scale artworks are given only a supporting role in the absence of monumental works. The chapters are organized chronologically, and then according to technique, with little grouping according to medium. Each chapter begins with a discussion of architecture, then proceeds to sculpture-in-the-round, relief and “two-dimensional art,” which includes glyptic and occasionally “toreutic,” or cast metal, art. Like Frankfort and Strommenger, Moortgat (1969: 120) praises the glyptic art of Mesopotamia and recognizes its artistic apex during the Middle Assyrian period when the glyptic artist “confines his passionate inner freedom within the restrictive limits of form which he himself had chosen... the pictorial surface is small, but the feeling of space which it suggests to the observer is vast.”⁸ Moortgat (1969: 15) considered the inlaid works of art of the Early Dynastic period, such as the milking frieze from Tell al-Ubaid and the Standard of Ur to be mere “incrustations, really coloured drawings,” which lacked any form of plasticity (of which he was fond). The portable works of art such as gold jewelry, cups, and weapons from the Royal Cemetery of Ur add little detail to Moortgat’s (1969: 44) narrative of gods and men:

⁷ Irene Winter (2000) warns that this is a dangerously anachronistic enterprise. She suggests that in the modern era of publishing, when photographs of tiny objects such as cylinder seals are writ large and juxtaposed with larger works of art such as life-sized sculpture and reliefs, the context of original scale and meaning is lost.

⁸ Moortgat is clearly, however, not as interested in glyptic art as were Frankfort and Strommenger. His discussion of glyptic art is incorporated into the narrative, but it is not consistently detailed for each period. Furthermore, he published the photographs and drawings of seal impressions only in a section separate from the other works of art that he discusses in his narrative, indicating he did not consider them to be as equal in status. This characteristic of the publication was criticized by Richard Ellis in his review of the book (1975: 81).

[They are] of course, only the work of craftsmen, and even the examples of inlay chosen for illustration in this book are not objects of great artistic value but merely decorations on implements and furnishings but nevertheless they are of outstanding importance.

Interestingly, this attitude contrasts with Moortgat's treatment of the ivory objects from Tomb 45 at Assur, which received no attention from the other two authors, although they had been excavated and published already by Walter Andrae in 1954 (Feldman 2006b). This conception, in which the author shows surprise about the quality of portable, non-glyptic art, is present in all three of the canonical works. Frankfort, Strommenger, and Moortgat all express surprise and delight at the variety, skill, or clarity present in some portable works of art, especially if there is a lack of concomitant large-scale objects, and mention their importance as a collected whole. However, they all also express a sort of anxiety of including such objects in their canons, begrudgingly giving them ink in the great contest of art historical attention.⁹

Art historians of the ancient Near East have inherited a legacy from the organization and narrative of these three treatises available in English. Frankfort, followed by Strommenger and Moortgat, established the canon for works of art that is still used today in most art history and archaeology programs of higher education. Equally important, when a scholar from another field such as Greece and Rome looks to the east for comparanda, he or she will most likely pick up one of these three books. Individually and collectively, they leave the distinct impression that architecture and large-scale works of art carved in stone with pictorial narratives should be the first "monuments" that we turn to when we attempt to understand the civilizations of the past. Secondly, the art of cylinder seals, glyptic art, takes precedence over other small-scale works. The surprise and delight that our influential scholars experienced when exploring the glyptic art was occasionally, if rarely, transferred to other portable works of art, depending on the particular personal and chronological interests of the each individual researcher.

The Material Culture Turn

With the task of establishing the canon complete, art historians could turn to further elaborating upon it, critiquing it, and understanding ancient Near Eastern cultures through it. Indeed, there is a long tradition in ancient Near Eastern art history of discussing individual works of art as well as in exploring groups of objects in research monographs, *Festschriften*, conference proceedings, and journal articles. Of course, to

⁹ This anxiety is most noticeable in the title of Edith Porada's defense of glyptic art, to which she devoted the majority of her scholarly career, to the greater art historical world in an article entitled "Why Cylinder Seals?" published in the journal, *Art Bulletin* (1993).

name even the most influential of these works would be impossible. However, a few general remarks regarding the treatment of portable and non-portable works of art will lead to an understanding of approaches to the portable artworks today. After the canonical exercises of the 1960s and 1970s in which the stylistic chronology was further refined and debated, in the 1980s and 1990s, art historians turned their attention to three important themes: the development of narrative programs in works of art, the production process, and the communicative capacity of objects. The influential work on narrative art in general and particularly on political programs of the monumental Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs was the central focus of art historical energy in the 1980s, and is certainly discussed elsewhere in this volume.¹⁰ But a concurrent interest in the economic contexts and communicative capacity of portable works of art from earlier periods developed in ancient Near Eastern art historical and archaeological circles around this time as well. New materials excavated by the University of Pennsylvania from levels dating to the first millennium BCE from Hasanlu in Iran, as one example, contributed to this interest (Marcus 1988, 1996; Winter 1989b) as did Roger Moorey’s¹¹ *Mesopotamian Materials and Industries: The Archaeological Evidence* (1999), which catalogued the archaeological contexts of thousands of objects and object types from the ancient Near East according to material and technique. This unillustrated encyclopedia was influential in providing a background for scholars to study works of art beyond iconographic and stylistic approaches. In addition, numerous publications on particular groups of cylinder seals (for example, Matthews 1993) and the cataloguing of the first millennium Nimrud ivories, a project undertaken predominantly by Georgina Herrmann,¹² approached the material from the traditional standpoint of iconography and style, but brought techniques of manufacture and production into consideration as well.

On the theoretical side, Ian Hodder (1986) and the school of contextual archaeology, which focused on the meaning of artifacts within their ancient social contexts, influenced the study of material culture, broadly conceived to include works of art as well as undecorated objects of daily life. Theoretical concepts about consumption (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Winter 1988), commodities, and the “social lives” of objects (Kopytoff 1986; Appadurai 1986) also influenced what I call “the material culture turn.” In the 1990s and early 2000s, the portable objects from the ancient Near

10 The seminal works in this field and scholars are too numerous to cite here. However, the work of Julian Reade (1979) and Irene Winter (1981) on the Neo-Assyrian reliefs influenced scores of students and colleagues to explore narrative programs.

11 A significant later iteration of Moorey’s approach is the *Festschrift* that was produced in his honor (Potts *et al.* 2003).

12 There are several volumes in the series publishing the ivories from rooms dating to the first millennium BCE at Nimrud, beginning in 1974 and concluding with the most recent sixth volume in 2009. Photographs of ivories from Nimrud in the British Museum and the British Institute for the Study of Iraq have all been made available electronically through the digitization project (Herrmann *et al.* 2004).

East, rather than the large-scale monumental stone sculptures, became as important to scholars for determining how ancient societies in the Near East understood their world. This resulted in their inclusion in the art historical canon in significantly more substantial ways.

Dominique Collon's *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (1995) is the most recent entry in the project to define a canon in ancient Near Eastern art (at least in English). Collon's narrative is based upon and limited in many aspects of its discussion to the collections of the British Museum, which fortunately contain objects from the diverse time and space of the ancient Near East. Organized chronologically and cognizant of earlier art historical and terminological debates, Collon's work does not follow a hierarchy of material or techniques for works of art. Since her approach is collection-based, her project focuses less on architecture than the earlier canons, and it juxtaposes discussion and illustrations of portable and non-portable works throughout. Furthermore, due to her own experience working on archaeological excavations and the fact that many of the objects in the British Museum come from secure excavated contexts, Collon approaches the art of the ancient Near East from the standpoint of a material culturist. For example, she explores the jewelry from Ur in great detail with a discussion of techniques and comparanda as well as stylistic analysis (Collon 1995: 72). While Collon's narrative is peppered occasionally with the traditional language inherited by the art historical legacy of which she is a part,¹³ in general her canon seamlessly integrates portable and non-portable works of art without privileging either in terms of language or allotted space.

Yet when scholars are forced to choose due to limitations of space and publishers' constraints, the relative allotment of art historical space to portable arts remains small and fraught with anxiety. In a recent and requisitely brief summary of Mesopotamian art in Blackwell's *Companion to the Ancient Near East*, Feldman (2005: 306) acknowledges that "the choice of where to begin a narrative of ancient Mesopotamian art remains bound up in the contested definition of art itself." She self-consciously "eschews comprehensiveness in order to penetrate more deeply into questions raised by art objects." Feldman (2005: 306–24) explains the tradition she has inherited and respectfully continues it as she traces a history of Mesopotamian art by highlighting works carved in stone, beginning with a discussion of the Uruk/Warka Vase of the fourth millennium, then leading to cylinder seals, Early Dynastic statues, the Naram-Sin and Hammurabi stelae, and concluding with Neo-Assyrian reliefs of the first millennium.

Examples of what I am calling the material culture turn in ancient Near Eastern studies include many contributions within the proceedings of the 1991 *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, *La circulation des biens, des personnes, et des idées*

¹³ As for example when she describes Hittite/Syrian cylinder seals of the late second millennium BCE as "simple objects which rarely have artistic merit" (Collon 1995: 110).

dans le Proche-Orient ancien/The circulation of goods, people and ideas in the ancient Near East (Charpin and Joannes 1992) as only a single example. A number of well-attended temporary exhibits of ancient Near Eastern art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York have been driven by this contextual approach as well, juxtaposing objects of different scales and materials in displays. These exhibitions considered the relevance of objects, from the Metropolitan's own collections as well as loaned by museums around the world, within their iconographic and stylistic, as well as archaeological and ancient political and social contexts. The published catalogues of these exhibits, with contributions from a wide range of acclaimed scholars, have added tremendously to the study of portable and non-portable works of art considered together (Harper *et. al.* 1993, 1995; Curtis and Reade 1995; Aruz and Wallenfels 2003; Aruz *et. al.* 2008). And finally, the last ten years have seen a number of studies apply Hodderian material culture theory to groups of portable works of art from the ancient Near East; I cite only a few here: Marcus (1993, 1994), Thomason (2005) and Feldman (2006a, 2006b), but there are many more.

Most recently, several European conferences and proceedings examining the style, iconography, and production of portable works of art have contributed to their relative rise in art historical attention. Perhaps most significant for the portable arts was a series of conferences and proceedings published in the *Orbis Bibliotheca et Orientalis* series inspired by Othmar Keel's method and approach to objects and iconography, which has been called on occasion the "Fribourg school." Suter's and Uehlinger's (2005: xx) introduction to the second of these volumes understands portable arts as "transmitters of visual information" and "'media' [that] convey the idea that images were always part of complex communication processes, both within and between ancient societies." But the editors, and other authors in the volume,¹⁴ use the term "minor arts" and demonstrate an inherited art historical anxiety when forced to discuss whether the portable arts should be considered "art" or "craft," writing, for example, that objects were "fashioned by craftsmen, who were neither intellectuals nor politicians and certainly not 'artists' in the modern sense" (Suter and Uehlinger 2005: viii). This ambivalence is perhaps best illustrated by the editors' use of the modifying phrase "so-called" before "minor arts." (Uehlinger 2000: xvii; Suter and Uehlinger 2005: xxxii). Despite their choice of words, the profile of portable arts within art history is raised most significantly within the material culture turn when Uehlinger (2000: xxv) argues:

[The minor arts] are particularly relevant for the study of intercultural contact. In the context of largely illiterate societies, minor arts had a much greater impact and larger diffusions than texts could ever achieve... Minor arts expressed and affirmed cultural values and traditions while being more open than monumental arts to foreign stimulus due to mobility of craftsmen and their products.

14 For example: Millard 2005: 1; Herrmann 2005: 15; and Mazzoni 2005: 43.

One of the enduring questions raised by scholars in these studies of portable art is how to relate them to non-portable works of art carved in stone and found throughout the ancient Near East in elite quarters and other spaces. The search for origins of production and workshops and the influence of the minor arts on major arts (or the reverse) have been central concerns of art historians since Frankfort established his canon. These approaches are especially prevalent in work since the 1980s. Frankfort and his successors were interested in the training and inspiration of the ancient relief carvers, and wondered whether “craftsmen” could produce works in several different materials and scales. Frankfort (1954: 37) writes that Mesopotamian wall painting (as at Mari, for example) “depended on the compositions of the seal engravers.” Many of the articles on “minor arts” from the late twentieth century respond to the controversial argument forwarded by Irene Winter (1982, 1989a) that minor works of art, such as carved ivories or metal bowls, inspired stylistic and iconographic emulation in the monumental stone reliefs and sculpture-in-the-round. Winter argued that this direction of influence might have been the case at Tell Halaf in Syria (1989a). Furthermore, the portability of “minor” works of art contributed to their central role in the borrowing and emulation of motifs across political and stylistic boundaries (Winter 1982, 1983). The focus on the impact of the portable arts and of the “craftsmen” who created them to some extent drove the interests in defining workshops and schools of production within the Nimrud ivory and other corpuses.¹⁵ The relative impact of portable arts has also been explored in the meetings and published proceedings of the recently formed International Congress of the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE, 1998-Present), where sessions related to the theme “High versus Low” continue to be offered on a bi-annual basis.¹⁶

The Identity and Agency Pivot

Many of these recent analyses of ivories, metalwork, jewelry, ceramics, seals, and other portable works of art also have been driven by studies on the formation of status and the importance of objects, especially luxurious items, in the performance of the artists’ and patrons’ social and political identities. Uehlinger’s (2005: xx) initial remarks for the *Orbis Bibliotecus et Orientalis* volume hint at this interest already in the

15 Discovering workshops was the driving impetus for the published catalogues of Nimrud ivories and related articles (Herrmann 2000, 2005; Herrmann *et. al.* 2004, 2009), as well as the Fribourg and other conferences on portable art of the first millennium BCE. See Herrmann, Winter, and Mazzoni in Suter and Uehlinger 2005; Bonatz 2005; Wicke 2008; and Cecchini *et. al.* 2009.

16 See for example, the sessions for the 6th (2010) and 8th (2012) ICAANE meetings: “High vs. Low: Visual Expression and Craft Production in the Definition of Social Relations and Status” and “High and Low – Minor Arts for Elites and the Populace.” Available from <http://www.ICAANE.org>, accessed 30 June 2012.

early 2000s when he suggests that art objects “have to be discussed as reflections of social and cultural identities.” The interest in identity follows a pivot in the material culture turn and reflects a strong influence by the anthropological and sociological theory of Bourdieu and other French sociologists (for example, Baudrillard 1968). The study of identity drives the field of ancient Near Eastern art history today, and is centered on the idea that

...an individual may have many simultaneous, as well as consecutive identities during her or his lifetime. These identities may include sex, gender, age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, and occupation (Steadman and Ross 2010: 1).

In the absence of ancient texts that discuss these identities self-consciously, objects often take center stage in identity studies of past worlds. A focus on individual actors, rather than aggregate expressions of cultures, drove a desire to return “people” to the ancient world as active agents formulating and expressing their identities within their prescribed, if malleable, social contexts. Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of *habitus* and Gell’s (1998) theory of art and agency inspired this theoretical current, as Winter (2007) and Feldman (2010) have discussed. A number of very recent anthologies that gather works by younger scholars focus on this aspect of material culture, and while they are too numerous to cite, they accurately reflect the present state of ancient Near Eastern art history.¹⁷ Rather than considering the “major” and “minor arts” in separate cultural and artistic vacuums, they interweave explorations of both portable and non-portable works of art with texts, architecture, ethnoarchaeological information, and other archaeological materials (for example, floral and faunal remains).

Archaeological excavations also advance the field of art history with new discoveries, which more often recover portable works of art than monumental stone sculpture. The objects from the second millennium BCE royal tombs at Mishrife/ancient Qatna in Syria and the studies of works from the first millennium queens’ tombs at Nimrud have provided ample material to inspire work on the portable arts created in many sizes, techniques and materials for years to come.¹⁸ These discoveries, along with the recent reconsiderations of the well-known material from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (for example Pollock 2007; Gansell 2007b), have allowed portable objects to take center stage on the ancient Near Eastern scene within the framework of two new scholarly approaches: a recent awareness of the importance of the body and its dress and adornment for the construction of identity and display of agency;¹⁹ and a new interest in banqueting, feasting, and ancient foodways that explores objects and

¹⁷ A good start would be Steadman and Ross 2010; and Cheng and Feldman 2007. See also studies published in Nakhai 2008.

¹⁸ For Qatna, see al-Maqdissi *et al.* 2009; for Nimrud, see Damerji and Kamil 1999; and Oates and Oates 2001.

¹⁹ Good 2007, 2010, 2011; Gansell 2007a, b; Baadsgaard 2008, and in this volume; Benzal *et al.* 2011; Thomason 2013.

images often represented by and on portable works of art (for example, Pollock 2003; Schwartz 2007; Ebbinghaus 2008).

Towards a Definition of Portable Art

Irene Winter (1995: 2570) defines art in Mesopotamia as “any work that is imaginatively conceptualized and that affords visual and emotional satisfaction, for which manufacturing skill is required and to which some established standards have been applied.” Using this working definition, all objects exhibiting these qualities in the ancient Near Eastern world could be considered art. What common characteristics, then, can we find within the portable works of art, which have received so much attention, alongside large-scale, fixed works in the past decade of scholarship? The definition of portable implies that one person could carry the work of art over potentially great distances. Furthermore, portable implies that a work of art did not necessarily have a single, fixed resting place.²⁰ In general, portable objects from the ancient Near East would have required specialized skills to create, and they held significant social, political, or ideological value as well-made, visible works of art for the producers, patrons, or consumers that experienced them. In addition, when we do have texts, they often discern the relative quality of skillfully mastered products regardless of scale (Winter 2007; Thomason 2010).

By this definition, even an undecorated cooking pot that was judged as a particularly useful vessel could potentially be considered art. However, the final aspect of Winter’s definition, that the object must also afford some sort of visual or emotional satisfaction bears heavily on defining “art” in the ancient Near East. This satisfaction could be determined by the scale, style, subject matter, compositional elements, or iconography of an object, as our art historical canonists have argued; but in order to determine this, we would need texts related to the objects to show us the “satisfaction.” In the absence of exegetically descriptive texts, however, we must rely on archaeological context to determine how an object garnered appreciation and satisfaction. Innumerable examples of portable objects made of durable materials such as stone, ivory, wood, ceramic, terracotta, or metals have been excavated from various contexts throughout the ancient Near East. Ross (2005: 335) writes that the portability of small statuary determines that “their meanings may not have been so fixed as we

²⁰ Interestingly, there are instances in Mesopotamia where an object originally produced and consumed in a fixed spot – intended as monumental art – becomes portable. For example, upon sacking Babylonia, with great effort, the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte brought back to Susa and set up within his temple several large and heavy stone stelae, including many well-known canonical works such as the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin and the “Law Code” of Hammurabi. While those objects did indeed travel, I would not consider them portable art, as they were typically not carried by a single person. For information about the Mesopotamian objects found at Susa, see Harper *et al.* 1993.

often suppose.” The satisfaction derived from an object in any one context might change as the object moves through its “social life” (Appadurai 1986).

Yet due to circumstances of preservation and modern excavation practices, portable objects are found most often, but not exclusively, in socio-economically elite contexts such as burials, restricted temple areas, or palaces and administrative buildings.²¹ Their very presence in these contexts could denote some sort of import and appreciation, as they imply that only certain individuals within a society had such choices in selecting objects for production and consumption and therefore had the opportunity to appreciate such luxurious works of art. On occasion, so-called “private” houses, which were not administered by royally appointed officials, have been excavated and contained portable works of art such as cylinder seals, small figurines or plaques in various materials, including rare examples of luxury objects (Bunnens 1997; Ross 2005: 339). Luxury objects in general are more commonly excavated from official contexts, as would be expected since the resources required to acquire them were impressive. These luxuries, including exotica, are characterized by the relative rarity of their raw materials, the amount and specialized nature of labor required for their production, the distance required to acquire them, and their restricted consumption (and in some cases production). Portable art objects, whether luxurious or commonplace, preserved or perishable, which exhibit characteristics of art according to Winter’s definition, are attested frequently in ancient Near Eastern texts, even if only occasionally in extant archaeological and museum collections.²²

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the impact of the “minor arts” has come full circle in the major canons of ancient Near Eastern art produced by modern scholars. From the early interests in ornament and design to the study of small-scale works of art in the performance of agency and identity, the portable art of the ancient Near East has finally received the extended attention of archaeologists and art historians. The tremendous variety in material, technique, subject, style, composition, and context witnessed with the portable objects allows perhaps a fuller understanding of the concepts of beauty and art in the ancient Near East. With the aid of texts from Mesopotamia in particular, our understanding of aesthetics and visual representation in the ancient Near East guides the modern exploration of works of art. Further scholarship in ancient categorizations of art from areas outside of Mesopotamia, such

²¹ Terracotta figurines and plaques provide an important exception to this condition. They are generally understudied, but recent work explores their significance in relation to non-elite contexts (see Graff and Langin-Hooper in this volume).

²² Archaeologists have called these objects, which were often not native to Mesopotamia and other parts of the ancient Near East outside of Egypt, “invisible exports” (Crawford 1973; Good 2010).

as within the texts of Ugarit or the Hittite world, will only enhance our understanding of what constitutes “art” in the ancient world and how small-scale works of art have had dramatic impact upon human actors and their choices. In addition, studies that explore the experience of viewing both monumental and portable works of art *in conjunction with each other*, will contribute to our knowledge of the meaning and function of objects in the ancient Near East. In the meantime, a conscious effort to avoid the value-laden vocabulary of Western art history in the study of the ancient Near Eastern works of art will continue to ensure that while we cannot be the “fly on the wall” to understand how the ancient people created, viewed and responded to works of art, we can come as close as possible to being in the room or courtyard with them.

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Francesca Onnis

The Influence of the Physical Medium on the Decoration of a Work of Art: A Case Study of the “Phoenician” Bowls¹

Abstract: It is commonly agreed that the decoration of the so-called “Phoenician” bowls displays a repertoire of figural motifs belonging to a Syro-Levantine and eastern Mediterranean tradition. These motifs traveled far in time and space and were also applied to other classes of luxury objects. However, the iconographic choices on the bowls differ to some extent from those seen in the other object genres. These choices are mostly related to the geographic and chronological frame in which they were produced. Yet, the physical medium also strongly conditioned and prompted the decorative project. The metallic nature of the objects, the shape of the decorative space available, and even the specific function of the vessel provoked specific constraints and trends in the imagery. Additional, non-material factors should also be taken into account, such as the economic and symbolic, and therefore cultural, value of the bowls. In this study, the relation between the object itself and its decoration is considered. The analysis indicates how much the former contributed to the conception and elaboration of the latter. This correlation also corroborates the hypothesis that the makers of the vessels still understood the meaning of these ancient motifs, which they shared, at least to some extent, with the consumers.

Keywords: decoration arrangement, drinking vessel, iconography, international style, Levantine art, luxury objects, material bearing, metal, “Phoenician” bowls, visual perception

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Introduction: The “Phoenician” Bowls – Origin and Definition of their Eclectic Decoration

The so-called “Phoenician” bowls² are a collection of metal vessels (gold, silver, and bronze) characterized by rich figurative decoration on their internal faces, arranged in

¹ An early draft of this paper was translated from the original French by Peter T. Daniels.

² For in-depth presentations of “Phoenician” bowls, see Markoe 1985; Moscati 1988b; Falsone 1992.

a central medallion surrounded by one or more registers (Fig. 1). They were found across a large geographic area in the Near East and the Mediterranean region. They date to the first four centuries of the 1st millennium BCE, but forerunners appear as early as the Late Bronze Age. Two generations have been distinguished. The first one dates to the 9th and 8th centuries and includes pieces in bronze found mostly in the Near East and the Greek/Aegean world. The second generation dates to the 7th century; its bowls are mostly made of silver and were found in Cyprus and Italy.

The decoration of the “Phoenician” bowls is strongly eclectic, bringing together iconographic motifs from a variety of artistic traditions, both Near Eastern and Mediterranean. All of them belong to the semantic sphere of the ideal of the good order of the world, either by invoking protection against adverse forces, whether human, natural, or supernatural, or prosperity, both through the beneficence of the gods. The entreaties were on behalf of the human being, both as an individual and a member of the community. The topics thus pertain to the celebration of deities (oblation, processions, presentations), of fertility (gods, goddesses, ceremonies, procreation, thriving of flora and fauna), and to the contrast between civilization and savagery (humanized world versus wild nature; military victories; mythological combat).

Owing to their eclecticism and their vast distribution, these vessels have commonly been credited to the Phoenicians, according to the traditional view of these people as skilled craftsmen. The position of Phoenicia at the crossroads of the Near East and Mediterranean sea, and its history of foreign dominations, influences and colonization, also made it an ideal candidate to create such an eclectic style. Nevertheless, the lack of examples from Phoenicia itself and the stylistic and typological variety of the bowls speak against this solitary ascription, and suggest instead a larger production, common to the Levant, Syria and Cyprus, as well as derivative production in some countries where the bowls were imported. Hence, the adjective “Phoenician” is maintained in this work only conventionally, and does not refer to place of manufacture. Other classes of art works show the same eclectic style as the metal bowls and have also been called Phoenician. Therefore, the eclectic style has been regarded as representative of Phoenician art. Yet, various indices suggest that the eclectic tendency came into being throughout an extensive geographic area, which included Syria, the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean.³ Its development goes back to the second millennium and certain elements even to the third. The “Phoenician” bowls would represent the Iron Age stage of its evolution.

The decoration of the “Phoenician” bowls has been taken as purely ornamental, devoid of any message and solely commercial, or, at most, having gradually lost any connection to a specific meaning.⁴ This view should be revised, because there is

³ Barnett 1935, 1939, 1948, 1975; Winter 1973, 1976.

⁴ Perrot-Chipiez 1882–1914, vol. III: 751–92; Poulsen 1912: 6–37; Contenau 1927–1947, vol. III: 1339–52; Frankfort 1954: 195–201, Moscati 1976: 9–10; 1982: 78; 1988a; 1990: 164, 172–77.

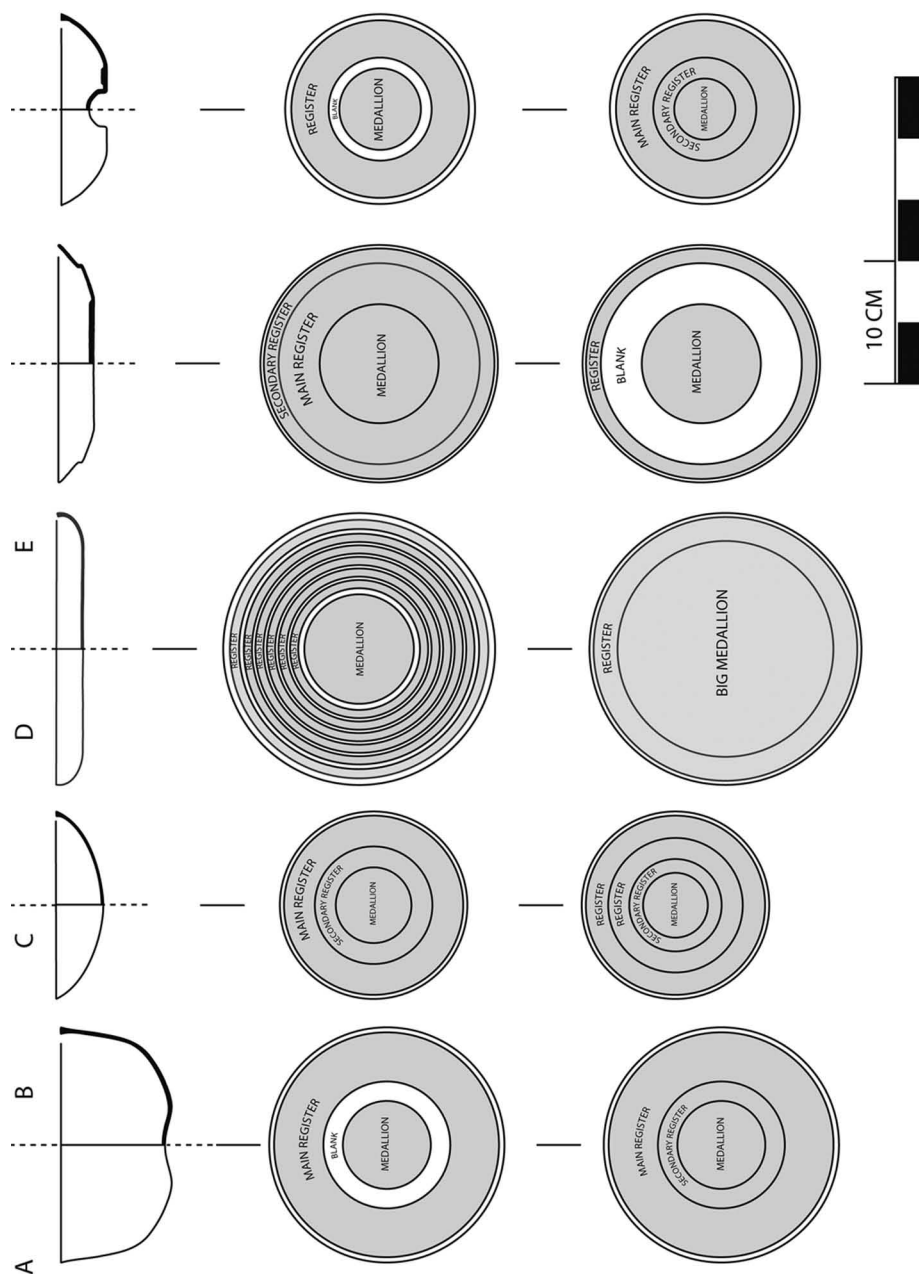


Figure 1: The various arrangements of decorative space of the “Phoenician” bowls according to their shape. Drawing by the author.

evidence that a close study preceded the composition of each bowl, and that the makers as well as the users understood, at least at a general level, the sense and value of these representations. I argue here that clues to this are given by the relationship between the decoration and the physical medium of the bowl itself, owing to its material properties, its form, and its function.

The “Phoenician” Bowls: Decoration and Physical Medium

Each art form relies on a physical medium, which simultaneously provides assets for and liabilities to its creation and expressivity.⁵ Some of these effects are linked to the material: its nature, its response to being worked, and its appearance. Others emerge after the medium has been fashioned into an object, with its own identity and function (such as furniture or armaments). In this case, the constraints can be physical, such as the shape of the surface available for decoration. Still others are on a more conceptual level, linked to the object’s use, its symbolic value, or its evocative potential.

Nature of the Material

Most of the “Phoenician” bowls are of bronze and silver, while a few are made of gold. Extensive traces of gilt have been found on many bronze bowls,⁶ most likely to make them look like gold. The choice of precious metal or imitations of it show that the “Phoenician” bowls were conceived as a luxury class of works. Gold and silver are considered precious materials in so many cultures that this can be taken as a general assumption.⁷ This is due to these materials’ properties. Their color and brightness provoke an aesthetic response, and they are easy to work due to their malleability and ductility. On the other hand, these properties also make them fragile and prevent their use as tools or weapons. Thus, gold and silver were reserved for artistic creations, especially smaller objects. Gold and silver are also precious because of their scarcity as well as the skill and specific requirements (temperature, tools) for working them. For these reasons, both metals also served as a medium for exchange and wealth. Furthermore, they are the only incorruptible metals,⁸ which, together with their

5 In the literature of the anthropology of materiality this is often referred to as “affordances” (Knappett 2005: 45–58).

6 See BM N.1 (Curtis – Reade 1995: 102, 139, no. 102).

7 Clark 1986; Omaggio 2001; Binder 2008; La Niece 2009.

8 Meaning they do not change when they come in contact with air.

brilliance, imbue them with the ideas of purity, nobility, excellence, and timelessness, and thus sacredness. The combination of rarity, preciousness, high economic value, and rich symbolism resulted in gold and silver being the chosen metals for prestige goods. As incorruptible and thus timeless metals, gold and silver are also symbols of eternity, so that they are privileged as materials for funerary goods. The objects act as talismans against the decay associated with death, while their prestige confers a high status *ab aeterno* (for gold, see Bunker 1983: 27). Gold possesses all these features, both physical and evocative, at the highest degree. Silver comes just behind. Gold is more precious than silver, but it is also more fragile. Therefore, gold is suited for fine jewelry or applied decoration on other materials, whereas silver is better for larger objects, making it particularly suitable for vessels. The value and the symbolism of gold and silver fit perfectly with the decoration of the “Phoenician” bowls. The precious metal medium invites the appearance of themes of a certain weightiness, pertaining to religion and beliefs, rather than subjects related to everyday life. The repertoire of the bowls is ultimately linked with the idea of royalty and legitimation of social power.

Particularly malleable, gold and silver sheets are predisposed to decoration. Line decoration can be chased or engraved effortlessly, as well as embossed, since the back of the decorative surface is accessible. Nonetheless, embossing cannot be very high, due to technical constraints (the tailing off of the foil weakens it and exposes it to breakage) and functional reasons (the capacity of the vessel). The two-dimensional decoration permits a wealth of details, which encourages descriptivism. In contrast, the atrophying of the third dimension weakens the expressive potential of the mass. In fact, illustrative and descriptive compositions are privileged on the “Phoenician” bowls. However, the rare cases where high relief occurs exploit the expressive potential of the mass. For example, in bowl BM N. 22 (Onnis 2009: 144, fig. 7a–b), the high relief of the figures provides a sense of violence to erupt from the depicted struggle. Bronze sheet, which is tougher than gold or silver, creates a better basis for relief. At the same time, it is particularly easy to apply a punched or stamped decoration to any metal sheet, perhaps explaining why the “Phoenician” bowls show a rich ornamental decoration, especially of repetitive series of small motifs.

Shape of the Medium and of the Decorative Surface

On the “Phoenician” bowls, the shape of the vessel determines that of the figural space. Here, the main feature of the figural space is its circular shape. Rudolf Arnheim (1984) notes that a circular form is best for objects that need to be freely moved in space. That is why, for example, tableware (such as glasses, plates, and bowls) and coins are also round. This functional logic, however, generates a sense of detachment and indifference on the part of the object with respect to its context. Roundness is the most general shape, providing little singularity of its own. It is thus “suitable for those

objects that belong nowhere and everywhere” (Arnheim 1984a: 115). It allows the object to be alienated from its external environment. Physically speaking, the circle has no corners, thus offering no prominent point of contact or impact. It can turn, or be turned, without involving any change at all. Visually and conceptually speaking, the circle has a center of its own, the reference point for taking all the other measures of the object. With no need to relate to an external context, it gives life to a world apart. Its boundary is also the most impenetrable. Thus, the world represented as round is a closed, hermetic universe, separated from the surrounding space. Moreover, as a fully and infinitely symmetrical configuration, the circle provides a form for the concepts of perfection and completeness. This has made it the representation of choice for philosophical and religious concepts like divinity, harmonious perfection, or cosmic unity (Arnheim 1984: 132–34). Because of these properties, in art the circular configuration was used in two opposite ways. On the one hand, it represented the superhuman, fully disconnected from the domain of terrestrial gravity. On the other, by evoking a “floating world,” not strained by the weight of human existence and free from any connection with the real world, it lends itself equally well to cheerful, frivolous decoration (Arnheim 1984: 146–47).



Figure 2: Bowl BM N.65, from Nimrud, Northwest Palace; 8th century BCE, bronze (diam. 22.2 cm). Photo by the author.

The figural subjects on the bowls respond well to these attributes of circular configuration, since they are more or less all related to the ideal of the universal order, which is guaranteed by the ruler with the benevolence of the gods. The famous “Pantheon bowl” (BM, N.65) illustrates how great a feeling of isolation in a world apart is created by placing iconography into a circular area. (Fig. 2) The bowl bears a

centrally planned composition. According to R. D. Barnett's reading (1935), this bowl represents an actual cosmos, where the mountainous land inhabited by wild fauna and flora is surrounded by the sky, the gods' dwelling. This effect would not have been achieved if the composition had been placed in a square, much less a rectangular, frame, as we can see in the figure. Its insertion in these frameworks would deprive the composition of its detachment from the space that surrounds it and would create points of contact with it.

The decoration of the "Phoenician" bowls also matches the reverse concept, namely that of the universal so well expressed by the circle. In fact, the universal discourse in its quasi-philosophical designs is concurrently the discourse that applies to everyone. Accordingly, the foreign iconographic subjects on the bowls are strongly depersonalized, by eliminating elements of the original model that could lead back to a specific historical-cultural context. Thus, the motifs are easily adapted to varied contexts. In addition, many bowls frequently show purely ornamental decoration, whose sole purpose is to wed the form of the dish with elegance.

With respect to the shape of the bowl, the absence of flanges or handles allows the vessel to be held anywhere along the edge and, consequently, to look at its decoration from any angle, all the way around.⁹ This mobility has mostly determined how the decoration was oriented. The latter is fixed by the central medallion, whose composition can be laid out on a radial plan or have a horizontal orientation. The radial plan is typical of the first generation of bowls,¹⁰ and is still the only one used in the pieces from the Near East of the second one. This plan is also the only one documented in the second millennium,¹¹ and thus it should belong to the original conception of this class of vessel. A decoration with a radial plan can be read from any angle, which on the bowls is enabled by the lack of handles. The original structure of the decorative composition with radial plan was then probably decided by the shape of the vessel.

9 The handleless shape of the "Phoenician" bowls was probably due to the manner they were supposed to be used (passed on from one user to another in a communally significantly ritual?) or their supposed destination (objects of frequent exchange and circulation?). However up to now, no explanation has been given for this shape, which was exclusively valuable for the "Phoenician" bowls. Therefore, it seems better to leave the reflections about this factor at the formal level.

10 See a bowl from Lefkandi (Popham 1995), or the bowl from Nimrud, BM N.66 (Falsone 1988: 99, fig. 30).

11 See two gold bowls from Ugarit: RS 5032, Aleppo Museum inv. 5472, and RS 5.031, Louvre Museum, AO 17208 (Schaeffer 1934, 1949: 1–49).

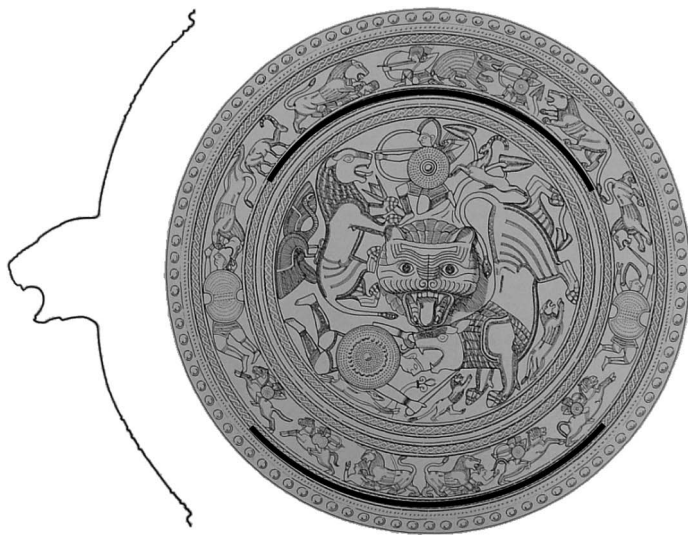


Figure 3: Votive shield Heraklion Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 7, from the Sanctuary of Zeus on Mount Ida; end of the 8th century, bronze (diam. approx. 83 cm). Drawing after Kunze 1931: Beilage 1.

The plan of the medallion shifts to the horizontal orientation in the second generation, seen on the bowls from Cyprus and Italy (see Louvre AO 20134 (Markoe 1985: Cy2) and Villa Giulia 61565 (Markoe 1985: E2)). When fixed, the medallion composition increases its expressive potential by gaining a strong effect of emblem. Its motifs become more pregnant with meanings. Yet, this area never develops amply or asserts itself on the registers. This must be due to the shape of the vessel, which is rarely completely flat-bottomed in Cypriot and Etrurian bowls.¹² The flattening of the bottom generally corresponds to an enlarging of the medallion.¹³ Nevertheless, quite often this does not obtain, and a first register encircles a small medallion on flat-bottomed bowls.¹⁴ The lack of handles on “Phoenician” bowls encouraged their continual rotation and may have determined the small size of the medallions.

An example of how the orientation of the decorative composition depends on its visual angle is provided by a comparison between the “Phoenician” bowls and the closely related class of artworks: Cretan metal shields.¹⁵ In the shields, the medallion is significantly bigger, often quite prominent, providing an impressive impact, whereas the registers look secondary to it. Moreover, in the registers, the groundline of the

¹² Compare profile and decorations of some bowls, from Cyprus: Matthäus 1985: Taf. 38–39:431, 432; and from Etruria: Neri 2000: tav. III; Sciacca 2006–2007: 285, fig. 4.

¹³ Compare Matthäus 1985: Taf. 32, 425 and 426.

¹⁴ See MMA 74.51.4554 (Markoe 1985: Cy8), Villa Giulia 13245 (Sciacca 2006–2007: 284, fig. 3).

¹⁵ Barnett 1974: 14–15; Kunze 1931: Beilage 1, Taf. 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 21, 26.

subjects corresponds to the edge of the register which is closest to the center in the upper half of the shield, and vice versa, to the edge farthest from the center for its lower half (Fig. 3). This arrangement complies with the vertical position in which the shields were held, ensured and kept from pivoting by handles on their back. Such conditions do not pertain to the bowls. Even if there had been a tendency to fix their orientation, it stayed discrete and limited to the medallion.

The Subdivision of the Figural Space

Looking at the vessel from above, and considering its decoration on the horizontal plan, the circular figural space given by the medium organizes the decoration around a medallion encircled by concentric registers (Fig. 1). This arrangement, together with the metallic material, identifies these vessels as a distinct class (Markoe 1985: 3, 13). The compositional use of concentric registers is rather rare in Near Eastern art.¹⁶ Nonetheless, this arrangement marked out a series of diplomatic gifts to which the bowls may have belonged (see below).

Concerning the registers, two main tendencies are involved in their design. On the one hand, the circle constrains, orders, and rationalizes, leading to dividing the surface and to arranging the figural elements according to a norm (Bouleau 1963: 42). On the other hand, the register takes on the compositional properties of a frieze.

The sense of order and constant correspondence that the circle inspires cause the bowls' registers to be divided into four quadrants (Fig. 4a). These compositions often play on echoes due to symmetry. Symmetry¹⁷ is only of the central kind, which fits naturally with the circular shape of the figural space by making its center correspond with that of the bowl's. Axial symmetry is also used on the bowls, but only within individual iconographic units and not in the overall composition. The central symmetry is certainly imposed by the figural space. In fact, a composition which does not respect the same rule of symmetry as its framework does not look harmonious. A test with the bowl from Crete, Heraklion 2316 (Markoe 1985: Cr1), demonstrates this. The piece provides a balanced combination of central and axial symmetry. When inserted in a framework which is built on the axial symmetry, in this case the escutcheon, the outcome (Fig. 5a) looks awkward and patchy. The drawing recovers all its balance when it is adjusted to the axial symmetry (Fig. 5b). The framework conditions even the internal subdivision. As a matter of fact, the escutcheon is only vertically symmetric, and the decorative composition works only if adapted to this latter. Instead, it looks unbalanced when related to other symmetries that the

¹⁶ Compare Chéhab 1983; Dentzer 1982: pl. 17, fig. 96–98; Gunter and Jett 1992: 106–47, nos 13–22; Dentzer 1982.

¹⁷ Symmetry between two figures is *axial* when there is a correspondence point to point with respect to a given line and *central* with respect to a given point (see James and James 1992: 410–11).

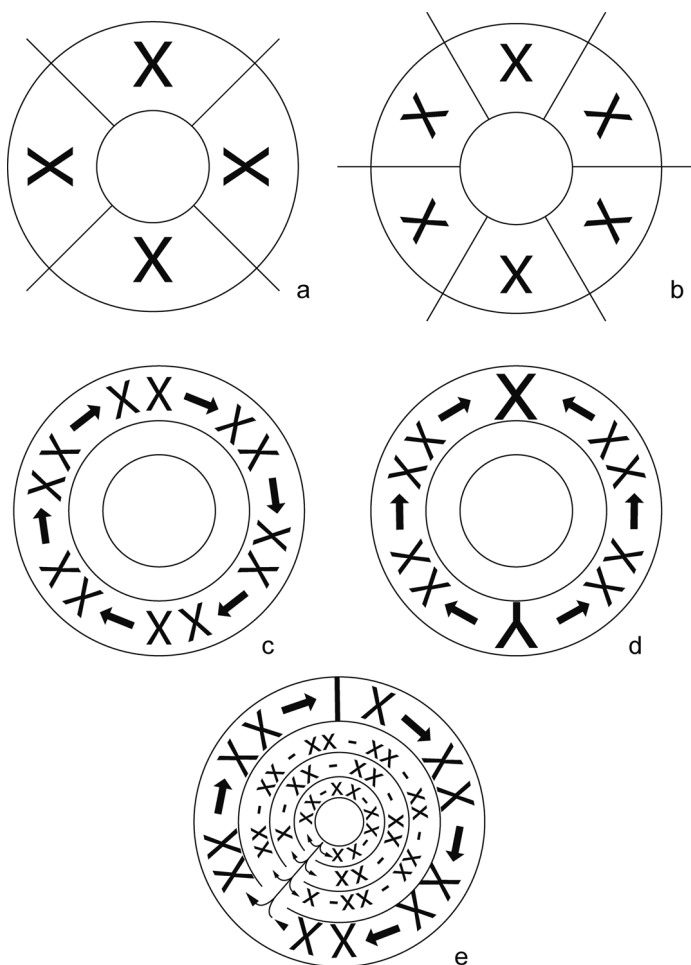


Figure 4: The various arrangements of the decoration in the registers of the “Phoenician” bowls. Drawing by the author, reviewed and enriched version of Rathje 1980: 8, fig. 1.

medium’s framework does not respect, in this case with regard to a horizontal axis, even if this latter is visually expressed (Fig. 5c).

The register is also a kind of frieze, with which it shares numerous properties. In the frieze, the reading proceeds progressively, which brakes the visual impact and therefore weakens the effect of monumentality but enhances the descriptive potential. This and the implied dissolution of limits on either side predispose the frieze to dynamism (Bouleau 1963: 31–32). This dynamic can exist in both space and time, thus generating movement and especially narrative. This potential probably favored dynamic iconographies on the “Phoenician” bowls, considering the great frequency of

the motifs that use it, such as races, animals speared on the hoof, or hunts. In contrast, motifs with emblematic structure, such as symbols, are much rarer. In fact, when the latter are included on the bowls without exploiting the dynamic potential of the frieze, the decoration loses its force. To give an example, in the bowl MMA 74.51.4557 (Markoe 1985: Cy8), the registers are densely filled up with individual, often heraldic units. The register is not divided into quadrants or metopes, which prevents the units from detaching and standing out. The whole composition appears rambling.¹⁸

Finally, as a round frieze, the register also enjoys the properties of the circle. Thus, by joining the idea of completeness, unity and isolation of the circle to descriptivism and dynamism, the register welcomes figural compositions that illustrate the many facets of a universal reality and truths, their dynamics and immutable laws. Such an example is the narrative of the “hunter’s day” in the bowls MMA 74.51.4556 and Villa Giulia 61565 (Markoe 1985: Cy7 and E2), which narrates the topic of the heroic adventure based on the round scheme: initial peace – crises – struggle – recovering of the initial peace.

On the “Phoenician” bowls, the intersecting registers and quadrant forms divide the registers into segments, that is, metopes, which create a more tightly packed sequence (Fig. 4b). This closed framework tends to freeze a representation. It augments its emotional impact but at the same time limits its descriptive potential. This happens frequently on the bowls, which often carry emblematic motifs in metopes. Nonetheless, the register maintains a strong linking force that logically binds the metopes together. Consequently, the latter either show the same subject repeated (Louvre AO 20135; Markoe 1985: Cy1) or sections of a unitary composition, involving dynamism and even narrative. The encounter between quadrant and register and their respective static and dynamic strengths is well illustrated on the bowl in Fig. 6 (Athens National NM X 7941). Its main register is divided into metopes, where emblematic representations alternate with descriptive scenes. The dynamic force of the register exerted such a strong force that one of the banquet scenes extends across two metopes. This phenomenon can happen even in bowls divided in four metopes, which is the most static form of composition.¹⁹ In contrast, examples where the subjects in the metopes are not logically linked to one another are quite rare.

¹⁸ The Late Bronze Age gold bowl from Ugarit of the Aleppo Museum (Schaeffer 1949: pl. II–V, VIII), does not disprove what has just been stated, since here the decoration is on the outside of the vessel, which requires it to be looked at in sections, thus permitting an isolation of the separate units in the register.

¹⁹ See bowl Berlin Ägyptisches AM 14117 (Fig. 7) illustrating a fluvial procession involving four ships.

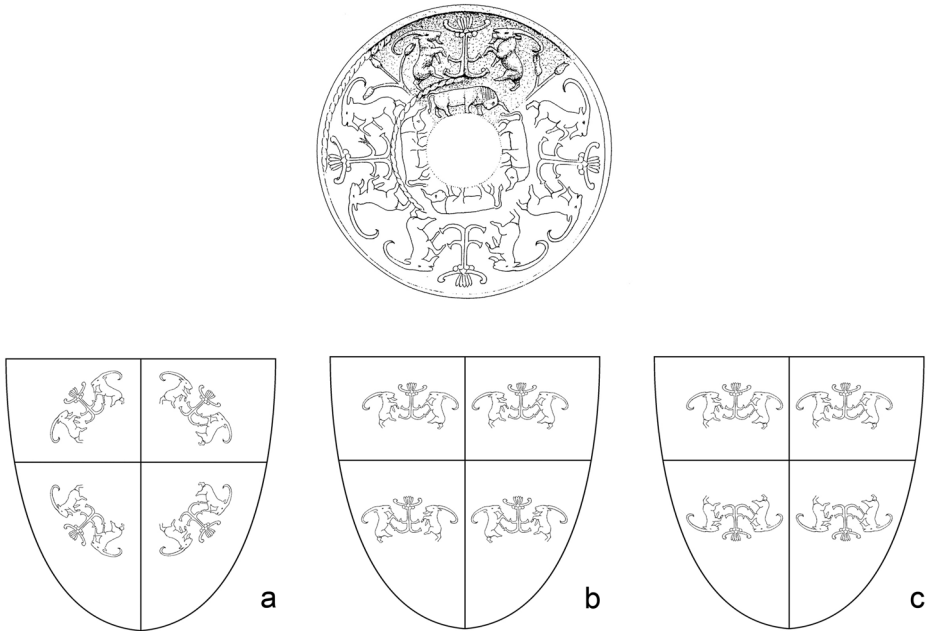


Figure 5: Bowl Heraklion Archaeological Museum inv. no. 2316, from the necropolis of Fortetsa, near Knossos, Crete; second half of the 9th century BCE, bronze (diam. 16 cm). Drawing of the bowl after Falsone 1987; escutcheon schemes: drawing by the author.



Figure 6: Bowl National Archaeological Museum of Athens inv. no. NM X 7941, from the sanctuary at Olympia, Greece; second half of the 8th century BCE, bronze (diam. 20.4 cm). Photo after Fontan and Le Meaux 2007: 136; drawing after Perrot and Chipiez 1882–1914: vol. III, 783, fig. 550.



Figure 7: Bowl Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin AM 14117, from Golgoi (Cyprus); 8th–7th century BCE, silver (diam. 16.5). Drawing after Cesnola Palma di 1877: 117, pl. XI.²⁰

The circular friezes have no beginning nor end, which enhances the effect of movement, accelerates it, and makes it whirl. The arrangement in concentric registers (which visually embraces the whirl), the possibility of rotating the bowl, and, often, the repetition of the same motif all around the register, amplify this effect. The observer tends to get lost in the whirl. The circular movement is just a little held by the fact that the viewer sees the entire composition all at once and sets anchorage points on it (top, bottom, right, left).

The configuration in circular friezes also emphasizes figural rhythm. The frieze is a visual construction that is closely linked to the idea of rhythm.²¹ In visual perception, as in acoustic, rhythm is given by a sequence of related elements, following one another orderly. The human eye naturally tends to convert these simultaneous stimuli in a succession. Therefore, the figural rhythm is provided by alternating elements of

²⁰ This old drawing has been preferred to more recent photos because, despite some mistakes, it registers a part of the medallion now lacking.

²¹ Bouleau 1963: 36–37; Martens 1992: 235–44.

different duration interspersed with pauses, following a regular scheme. In the registers of the bowls, iconographic markers lend the rhythm, especially the pauses, which correspond to scene dividers. The pauses are often narrow and vertically extended, recalling the radii of the circle. Their duration depends on their visual impact. As in acoustic rhythm, the more there are pauses and the shorter they are, the faster the rhythm is. Thus, in a register divided into quadrants, the rhythm based on sweeping movements is relatively slow, whereas it speeds up considerably in a metope structure, going even faster in the continuous frieze, where pauses are so discrete that they do not interrupt the framework. The repetition of a single iconographic element also underlines the rhythm (Moro 1985: 85). The motif of the lines of warriors is an expressive example of this rhythmic composition (see Villa Giulia 13245: Markoe 1985: E5). In two situations, there are no pause markers. Either they were not needed for the understanding of the cadence, such as when the same motif is identically repeated,²² or else the emphasis on the fiery, whirling movement renders them superfluous, as for sequences of animals, between predators and prey (BM N.27; Layard 1853b: pl. 65).

Dividers and spatial references are also used for marking the boundary between the scenes, which brings about a better understanding of the decorative project. In fact, as we saw above, on most “Phoenician” bowls, the reading is not immediately obvious. The viewer finds himself considering the whole composition at once, but at the same time is obliged to follow the individual registers for reading. Moreover, the whirling effect given by the concentric arrangement makes it difficult to fix reference points. The reading is particularly hard in those compositions where these points are not sufficiently marked.²³

As for the directionality of reading²⁴ the “Phoenician” bowls, within the registers, both directions left-to-right and right-to-left are attested. There is a well-known general tendency of the brain to read the visual field from left to right (Arnheim 1984: 45–46). But the radial plan probably breaks this horizontal directionality of reading. Also, the right-to-left direction of writing the semitic languages may have had an influence, since the register is “read” as a line. The other spontaneous reading

22 See Villa Giulia 61543 (Markoe 1985: E4), especially the inner register, and most of all Sibari 68383 (Markoe 1985: Ca1).

23 The registers that are occupied entirely by hunts, where we cannot identify a beginning or end, sometimes give rise to paradoxical narratives. See the flat bottomed bowl from Ugarit (Schaeffer 1949: pl. I, VII), depicting a hunt, where the bull appears to pursue the chariot. Nonetheless, in similar cases the effect may have been intentional, to accent the fervor of the movement.

The difficulty in reading the “Phoenician” bowls is well illustrated by the bowl MMA 74.51.4555 (Fig. 8), whose narrative was not understood until more than a century after its discovery (Culican 1982). See the scheme of its complex reading in Fig. 4e.

24 Reading is here not intended as the course of the observer’s perception, which is now known not to follow an order (Martens 1992: 242), but as the course that the design maker indicates and that the observer later on recognizes.

direction, from top to bottom, is also preserved on the bowls, and establishes a hierarchy among the registers. Starting from the highest half of the bowl, the viewer encounters the registers from the outermost to the innermost, finally pausing at the center. In parallel, he tends to carry on the reading of each register. Thus, the reading goes from the outermost register toward the innermost, and for each register it begins spontaneously at its zenith.²⁵ The pull toward the center (Arnheim 1984) interferes with this scheme, since the central position is a key emphatic one. This pull is stronger when the medallion is bigger and its decoration more complex (figurative compositions attract more than ornamental ones, because they require time for their reading). However, the top's contrasting attraction as a starting point provides the impression that the center, when looked at first, is "in the middle" of something that has begun above. Thus, even if the initial impact of the medallion is strong, the observer is soon drawn to read the registers. In any case, the lower half of the bowl remains subordinate to the upper half. As we will see further on, other indices, related to the shape and function of the bowl, confirm the outside-inside hierarchy of the registers.

According to the reading order stated above, when the bowls are oriented in a four-fold manner, often first the zenith, then the nadir, become iconographic foci. Specifically, they are the starting and ending point of a dynamic. When unilateral, the dynamic generally starts from the zenith to return there, and, when bilateral, it goes from the nadir to the zenith (Fig. 4d). That is because the composition takes into account the force of gravity. Indeed, even if the physical plane of the bowls' decoration is horizontal, the viewer does not erase the notions of up and down from it. At the same time, under the influence of the physical experience, the viewer transposes the downward tendency of the force of gravity onto the representation. This gives the figural subjects their weight and leads to a conception of those that are placed higher as lighter than those placed lower (Arnheim 1984: 18–49, 78). The radial plan of the bowls does not invalidate the impression of gravitational force, and therefore its lower half looks heavier than the upper half. Consequently, when a composition has a specific orientation, an upward directionality in the dynamics serve to lighten the representation. In the rare cases where the dynamics lead downward, the bowls appear weighed down. A comparison between the bowl BM 1931,0819.1 (Markoe 1985: Cy4) and another one from the necropolis of Arkades (Heraklion Museum; Markoe 1985: Cr12) presents an example of these different effects. The first one shows the siege of a town, where impetuous but nimble armies hurl themselves from both sides at the walled town in the top of the register, providing a sense of action. On the second, lines of animals approaching from either side of the register proceed toward two opposed sacred trees. The two different visual dynamics thus formed are balanced, because the bowl does not have a fixed orientation. Nonetheless, if we look at the bowl when it is

25 When a bowl has a clear orientation, we call *zenith* the highest point of its decorative surface and *nadir* the lowest.

held in a vertical position, the downward leading dynamic seems stronger, pulling the entire composition.

Yet, as a physical object, the “Phoenician” bowl also has a third dimension. This strongly affects the decoration, as it raises it on a surface which is neither totally flat nor horizontal, but instead irregularly modulated. The way the decorative space is divided and how the iconographic subjects are related depend strictly on the profile of the vessel. Indeed, this determines the number and the width of the registers, by imposing their edges along its prominent lines (bottom, wall, any carination, rim...). Furthermore, this provides a rhythmic experience which “animates” the vessel. In fact, beyond the initial impression of variety, the decorations in the registers linked one another together through recurrent configurations and formal echoes, while they vary following a logical scheme. The registers’ width increases from the bottom to the top of the vessel, while the iconographic motifs get more complex, either formally or conceptually. On account of the formal echoes, the viewer tends to agglutinate the registers as a single object, to which the variations give the impression of moving or metamorphosing. This illusion effect is called stroboscopic (Martens 1992: 244–53), and makes the decoration seems to come “alive” and to “evolve” towards a more and more complex state as it “moves” from the bottom to the rim of the vessel. Now, this evolution proceeds up the profile of the bowl, which rises obliquely. The human eye tends to interpret complex shapes as originally simple shapes that a force has deformed. Accordingly, the bowl’s profile appears as a cylinder the same height as the actual bowl, which a force has broadened from the bottom towards the top. This force corresponds to that which stimulates the decoration’s evolution. Both vessel and decoration seem then to be dilated, formally or logically, by an identical force. This outcome is the esthetic device that Didier Martens (1992: 235–83) calls “*animation rythmique*.”

Whenever the decoration has multiple registers, it invariably shows this progression. Evolution can take place on different levels. The following presents some examples, with a schematic description of the evolving states, from the interior outward. The dimensions of both the height of the registers and the size of the motifs always increase. MMA 74.51.4555 (Fig. 8) exhibits increasing size of the iconographic subjects, while Sibari 68383 (Markoe 1985: Ca1), whose motifs recall, from the innermost to the outermost register, dots, vertical lines, increasingly larger horizontal lines, and a continuous band, displays increasing formal complexity. An increasingly complex iconographic structure is seen, for example, in Louvre AO 20134 (Markoe 1985: Cy2), with its move from static and emblematic to static and narrative motifs. BM N.49 with increasingly composite vegetal motifs (Onnis 2009: fig. 8a) and a bowl from a private collection showing a progression from vegetal to animal to human motifs (Calmeyer 1964: 49, no. 106, Abb. 7, Taf. 52–53; Markoe 1985: Comparative photo 9) present examples of a logical evolution. Likewise are several of the so-called bull bowls showing cows and calves in the inner registers and bulls in the outer, such as BM 1965,1215.1 (Markoe 1985: U5), a bowl from Ortiz collection (Falsone 1985), Real

Academia inv. no. 2000/29 (Almagro-Gorbea 2004). Many of the bowls mix various evolving schemes, such as BM 1931, 0819.1 (Markoe 1985: Cy4), which moves from simple emblem to composite emblem to dynamic narrative, and Louvre AO 20135 (Markoe 1985: Cy1) progressing from geometric motifs to vegetal motifs to emblem to dynamic motifs. On bowl Boston 1994.49 (Markoe 1985: U8), the animation takes place in a single register. The composition expands from bottom to top, by means of the increasingly enlarged figures and the enriched decoration. Bowl MMA 74.51.4551 (Markoe 1985: Cy9) is an elegant example. After the initial impression of repetitiveness, in the inner register finely engraved aquatic birds appear, whereas the outer one shows stags and lions, a little more numerous than the birds. Both registers provide an impression of a quiet dynamic, but the external one leads one to foresee a sudden explosion of speed and violence in anticipation of the predators attacking their preys.

The summit of the decorative evolution is located where the spatial expansion is at its greatest, that is, on the outermost register. When the latter is itself closed by another narrower register, this corresponds to the rim of the bowl, and works as a frame where the dilating force has been deported from the main register.²⁶

Rhythmic animation is a consistent feature in the “Phoenician” bowls, because, as in the case of the symmetry, the medium dictates its rules to the decoration. If the shape of the medium and the composition are not well-adjusted, the latter is not harmonious. This happens, for example, when the registers are of equal dimensions, which makes them lose their hierarchy and confuses the reading.²⁷ The lack of structural or logic progression also weighs down the composition, as for example on the bowl MMA 74.51.4554 (Markoe 1985: Cy8), discussed above. On bowl Cleveland 1947.491 (Markoe 1985: U7), the internal register shows a faster and more convulsive dynamic than the external one, which gives an unbalanced outcome. In fact, the authenticity of this bowl is questioned. However, there is no danger of this happening on those bowls whose profile is visually “steady”²⁸ as no force seems to be applied on them. Such is the case of flat-bottomed bowls, which are harmoniously decorated with narrow and repetitive registers (BM N. 3, 59; Layard 1853a: pl. 59: E, B), as well as on the close-shaped bowls, which mostly show a single, non-evolving register (see MMA 74.51.5700 (Markoe 1985: Cy3); and Athens Kerameikos M5 (Markoe 1985: G1)).

²⁶ See BM N.19 (Onnis 2009: 144, fig. 5:a-c); and BM N.17 (Onnis 2009: 144, fig. 7:a-b).

²⁷ See Villa Giulia 61543 (Markoe 1985: E4) and 13245 (Markoe 1985: E5); Museo Gregoriano 20368 (or 20364) – 775 (Markoe 1985: E6), 20367–767 (Markoe 1985: E7) and 20366 (or 20364) – 769 (Markoe 1985: E8). It is not by chance that these bowls have been considered as late in the series and the fruit of a degenerate mass production.

²⁸ In the sense that it is formed by lines which optically do not seem to move, that is either horizontal or vertical.



Figure 8: Bowl Metropolitan Museum of Art 74.51.4555, from Cyprus; 7th century BCE, silver (diam. 15.3). Drawing after Culican 1982.

The Function of the Object

The function of the medium of the work of art conditions the decoration by establishing the way it is looked at. The manner of holding the bowls from the bottom in an open hand, together with the open shape of the vessel, allow the interior to be seen and invite one to place the decoration there. The decoration is thus seen from above, perpendicularly or at a slight angle, and is immediately grasped in its entirety.

However, concerning the “Phoenician” bowls, the concept of function cannot be reduced only to physical utility, but includes also their symbolic significance. The “Phoenician” bowl was a drinking cup used in libation and banqueting contexts.²⁹ Archaeological and figurative evidence shows they were linked to wine consumption.³⁰ This connection continued with their transfer to the Mediterranean area.³¹

²⁹ Avigad and Greenfield 1982: 122–23; Pritchard 1954: figs no. 332.

³⁰ Oren 1973: fig. 45, 1–3; Barnett 1974: 30.

³¹ Falsone 1988: 94; Popham 1995. The most important and ancient iconographic evidence comes from the “Phoenician” bowls themselves: BM 1892.5–19.1, MMA 74.51.4557 (Markoe 1985: Cy5, Cy6);

Here, the appearance of the “Phoenician” bowls seems contemporary to that of the reclined banquet involving the consumption of wine, generally called *symposion*. Originally coming from the Near East (probably from the Levant), this practice was connected with the ritual of the *marzeah* of the written sources (King 1989), and was diffused in the Mediterranean area in the first half of the 1st millennium BCE.³² Thus, the “Phoenician” bowl type may have followed the diffusion of wine consumption, particularly the *symposion* ritual, from the Near East to the Mediterranean.

The *symposion* can be understood to be part of a set of practices and equipment linked to the display of royal or elite power and social status, which the Mediterranean cultures borrowed from the Near East as they were evolving into complex societies. It has thus been suggested that their newly formed ruling class, facing a new need to legitimate and affirm their authority in a more sophisticated manner, had adopted many instruments from the Near East, where much older monarchies had long before held such banquets. As a prestigious symbol of taking part in the banquet, the “Phoenician” bowl seems to have been one of the main items of this equipment. It served as display object, personal but not intimate, and status symbol. At the same time, its material eternity and sacred character predisposed it for funeral assemblages.

The “Phoenician” bowls were also exchanged as economic valuables or diplomatic gifts. The practice of gift exchange was well established in the Late Bronze Age and an important device for the functioning of an intense international network of political and commercial relations existing among the states of the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. The second millennium forerunners of the “Phoenician” bowls were one of these diplomatic gifts classes. The “Phoenician” bowls of the Iron Age seem to have kept this function, even if they were probably intended to ratify mostly economic relations.³³ This function may have determined the themes that developed in their decoration, as I have recently suggested, noting that the decoration of the bowls might be the Iron Age legacy of the figural repertoire known as the Late Bronze “international style” (Onnis forthcoming). This repertoire appears in series of luxury objects intended for diplomatic gifts (Feldman 2006), among which we find the “Phoenician” bowls’ forerunners. The repertoire of the Iron Age “Phoenician” bowls

MMA 74.51.4555 (Fig. 8). For seated banqueting, see bowls Villa Giulia 61565, Museo Gregoriano 20365–772 (Markoe 1985: E2, E9). For the Greek world, see Dentzer 1982: pl. 17, no. 105.

32 There is no consensus on whether and when the *symposion* was adopted in Greece from the Near East. Jean-Marie Dentzer and Burkhard Fehr assume that this happened around the end of the 7th century BCE. (Fehr 1971; Dentzer 1982: 429–30). Oswyn Murray dates it from the second half of the 8th century (Murray 1994), whereas Hartmut Matthäus (1999) argues for the early 8th century. See also Murray 1983, 1990; Murray and Tecusan 1995; Matthäus 1999–2000.

33 Cf. Onnis forthcoming; Frankenstein 1979: 286; Coldstream 1983: 205–07; Ampolo 1984: 471–74; Beer 1984: 361–63; Zaccagnini 1984; Grottanelli 1991, esp. 398; Markoe 1992; Aubet 1993: 106–17; Gras 1995: 113–16, 128, 136–38; Matthäus 1998; Niemeyer 2003: 204–206; Riva 2005, esp. 208; Sciacca 2006–2007.

shows significant resemblance to the international style. It seems to have kept its original kernel and nourished it with new, contemporary contributions, always from different regions. The international style is marked by the fact that its motifs avoid references to any historical context. This was achieved by melding together stylistic trends coming from various artistic traditions and by blurring most of the elements that might lead back to a specific culture or historical moment. This depersonalization is to be seen as an adaptation to the exchange purpose for these vessels and the consequent need to satisfy the taste of a diverse and fickle public. The “Phoenician” bowls of the 1st millennium show this depersonalization too. Therefore, we may affirm that this particular adaption of the repertoire has been engendered by the function of the bowls as exchange objects. However, since the choice of these same themes and the relative depersonalization are not exclusive to the metal bowls, but pertain to several other categories of luxury diplomatic objects, this direction of analysis is not pursued here, and instead this paper concentrates only on those aspects that are specific to the vessels.

The specific function of the bowls is to hold liquids. The content hides the internal decoration, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the nature of the liquid. These conditions provoke an expectation towards the decoration, which discloses itself progressively as the user drinks. The registers would reveal themselves starting from the outermost to the innermost, and within each register from the top to the bottom, as the drinker emptied the bowl and tilted it towards his face, thus following the reading direction described in the previous section. Nonetheless, the viewer would be able to more completely contemplate the decoration when he held it in the hand than when sipping. Therefore, the very last area of the bowls that would be discovered was the medallion, which thus must have carried a very semantic charge.

In some decorative compositions, the presence of the liquid has been taken into account in order to create a figurative illusion (Martens 1992: 25–34). This visual effect encourages the viewer to credit the representation as if it was the actual reality. The “Phoenician” bowls show some examples of the illusionistic construction by which the liquid in the vessel appears as a watery context (Martens 1992: 120–35). The bowls Villa Giulia 61574 (Markoe 1985: E2), Baghdad 105697 (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 104, no. ND6, ٢٥٣, pic. 48), and Berlin AM 14117 (Fig. 7) show a quadrant composition of four boats represented as floating over a waterline.³⁴ When the level of the liquid content of the bowl coincides with this waterline, the boats seem to float on it. The representations are enriched with other elements, vegetal and animal, suggesting an aquatic context, and which are also located in order to fit with the liquid. On bowls Baghdad 105697 and Berlin AM 14117, an even more complex representation involves the medallion, where some human figures appear swimming, among fishes (also a horse and an ox!) and water plants. Thus, they appear as if swimming inside the

³⁴ These bowls derive from the Egyptian New Kingdom *Nunschalen* bowls (Strauss 1974).

liquid. Other bowls show water plants in order to look as if they rose from the liquid content when the liquid goes down to the right level.³⁵ More generally, we may ask if the arrangement in circular registers was not a wink to the illusion of making all the subjects seem to walk on the water as the liquid decreased.

Moreover, the “Phoenician” bowls were employed in contexts of banquet rituals.³⁶ This communal context must have encouraged the evident preference for subjects connected with a public sphere, whether at the elite level or a broader one. The themes that are tackled are in fact war, the hunt, heroism, and the bounty of the land and of nature. In contrast, themes connected to the private life of the individual, such as the fertility of woman, are not favored.³⁷

The use of the bowl in libations and banquets also explains why these rituals are often represented in their decorations. Sometimes they illustrate divine epiphanies, perhaps by the intervention of a representative (MMA 74.51.5700; Markoe 1985: Cy3); in other cases, they show kings or heroes (Villa Giulia 61565; Markoe 1985: E2); in others, the people are not sufficiently detailed to determine their identity or their role (BM 1892.5–19.1; Markoe 1985: Cy5). The stereotyped formulas of these scenes suggest that they were not memories of actual events. By erasing all references to a specific context, the representation is not a single episode of a particular banquet, but becomes “the” representation of “the” banquet. This choice may result from the need to present the banquet in its universal dimension, and to make the bowls a means of perpetuating the ceremony, along with the beneficial effect it was expected to bring about.³⁸ Or, it could just be a device to make a figurative product to which users belonging to different cultural identities could identify.

In addition, with the banquet motifs, a phenomenon of mimesis takes place between the viewer and the figurative characters. All these scenes represent the instant when the characters drink the beverage, raising a bowl of identical shape to the “Phoenician” bowls in their hand. Thus, the viewer looks at a person who is in the very same position as him, banqueting with the bowl in his hand, almost as in a mirror. This mimesis may hold more significance than a simple visual game. In fact, by this device, the maker may have wanted to give the viewer the way to enter the noble setting that is illustrated, and therefore, give him the status that the membership to this setting symbolizes.

³⁵ See bowl MMA 74.51.4551 (Markoe 1985: Cy9), and its two papyrus clumps.

³⁶ See, for example, concerning the bowls of the Bernardini Tomb, Canciani and von Hase 1979.

³⁷ For example, Bes, a favorite figure of the Levantine repertoire which is very closely related to the maternal sphere, never appears on the bowls. The only occurrence of this god is on the bowl BM N.65 (Fig. 2), where he appears as just a member of a pantheon.

³⁸ With the same entreating purpose, the Cretan shields are illustrated with scenes of hunt and war, and of heroism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all the characteristics of the “Phoenician” bowls (material, formal, decorative, stylistic) converge to make it an object intended to communicate power and status, meant to circulate within a high social milieu. They may constitute the continuation and evolution of the Late Bronze Age “international style,” along with other classes of artworks. When applied to the metal bowls, this common repertoire was adapted to that specific medium and developed some original features. The material, shape, and function of the bowl deeply influenced the decorative program. The rigid framework imposed by the medium developed a strong sensitivity for composition, which was very carefully studied in the conception of the decorative project. The iconographic motifs were entirely linked to the object that constituted the physical medium, from the point of view of its material use, symbolism, or evocative potential. The decoration was then adjusted in order to play with the liquid contents and to communicate status to viewers belonging to the elite classes of different cultural backgrounds.

Thus, on several accounts, the decoration of the “Phoenician” bowls was conceived to some extent especially for these objects. These conditions demand that we set aside the demeaning proposition that solely a decorative impulse operated on the bowls, with no interest in its content. It was the concern of the maker for the expressive success of the work, much more than has been generally supposed. This harmony between the decoration and physical medium may have provided, among other factors, the success of the “Phoenician” bowls, which made them be so largely distributed.

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Abbreviations of the names of Museums in the Naming of the Bowls

Athens Kerameikos: Kerameikos Archaeological Museum, Athens

Athens National: National Archaeological Museum of Athens

Baghdad: Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Berlin Ägyptisches: Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin

BM: the British Museum, London

Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
 Cleveland: Museum of Art, Cleveland
 Heraklion: Heraklion Archaeological Museum
 Louvre: musée du Louvre, Paris
 MMA: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
 Museo Gregoriano: Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Musei Vaticani, Rome
 Real Academia: Real Academia de Historia, Madrid
 Sibari: Museo archeologico nazionale della Sibaritide, (Sibari, CS – Italy)
 Villa Giulia: Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, Rome

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Yelena Rakic

Impressions of the Contest Scene: Glyptic Imagery and Sealing Practice in the Akkadian Period

Abstract: In the study of ancient Near Eastern art, the Akkadian period is considered to be an era of profound artistic creativity even though a relatively small number of works of art have survived. Glyptic art is the exception, and a huge corpus of seals exists in which to view this amplified artistic expression. Seals functioned within the highly developed administration that the Dynasty of Akkade established to manage the state when it unified Mesopotamia in the later third millennium BCE. The most popular subject matter of Akkadian seals, the contest scene, underwent a transformation over the course of the Dynasty's history. This imagery, depicting various types of human, animal and composite figures, typically engaged in some form of combat, was inherited from the preceding Early Dynastic period. Among other changes, the composition of the Akkadian contest scene evolved from a frieze of interlocking groups of rampant animals and other standing figures, into the "classic" Akkadian contest with two pairs of contestants flanking a framed inscription. This essay explores the development of the contest scene as a response to the nature of sealing practice, which itself underwent a transformation during the Akkadian period. The introduction of new types of sealed artifacts, such as bulla-labels and inscribed tablets, stimulated the development of variant imagery to convey different and/or new kinds of information related to these sealed artifacts, as well as the overall administrative system.

Keywords: glyptic, cylinder seals, sealing practices, cuneiform tablets, Akkadian contest scene

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Introduction

In the study of ancient Near Eastern art, Akkadian glyptic imagery has been celebrated for its particularly rich repertory of motifs and innovative iconography. A huge corpus of cylinder seals and a smaller number of their ancient impressions on clay sealings and tablets survive, dating to the historical period when the Dynasty of Akkade controlled greater Mesopotamia in the third millennium BCE. The best known seals are exceptionally well carved and exhibit an impressive attention to detail that

showcases the often-praised accomplishments of Akkadian artists; yet a variety of styles executed in varying degrees of competency are represented in this corpus. One subject of Akkadian glyptic that aptly demonstrates the range of styles present in the relatively short time span of the Dynasty's rule (ca. 2334–2154 BCE) is the contest scene (Fig. 1). Amidst the seeming explosion of new themes in the Akkadian period, the contest scene – showing various types of human, animal and composite figures, typically engaged in some form of combat – was not new, but changes in the imagery, particularly the composition, were. In some cases these changes have been ascribed to choices in artistic expression, resulting in a carving style that accentuated the physicality and musculature of the figures. According to this view, the seal carver's new interest in realism – as reflected in the rendering of figures with greater modeling and naturalistic detail – dictated a change in the treatment of space, since more room was needed for the figures than in earlier depictions of the contest. The compositional scheme of the Akkadian contest scene that best illustrates this new design and carving style is the Two Pair contest (Fig. 1) – the pinnacle of achievement of the seal-carver's craft.

As miniature works of art, the highest quality seals of the Akkadian period inspire wonder through their great aesthetic appeal. However, seals had functional roles as tools of administration and need to be considered when possible within such a framework. It is generally accepted that sealings are artifacts of administration that reflect administrative procedure, and that the study of sealings can be a means to examine the act of sealing and the function of seals within administrations (Gibson and Biggs 1977; Winter 2001). During the Akkadian period, the reorganization of the state administration was an important element of the Dynasty's strategy of political control and rule, as it sought to assert its authority over an expanding zone of influence in Mesopotamia. Among its features were the standardization of weights and measures, year date formulae based on royal events, and new accounting systems (McMahon 2012: 650). Seals and sealings participated in this administrative world, and reconstructions of the economic management and organization of the state provide a useful context in which to examine Akkadian glyptic art. Changes in administrative practices included such things as the standardization of tablet shape and script, and may have influenced sealing practices as well. In this essay, I will explore the relationship between imagery and sealing practice by focusing on the imagery of the contest scene, specifically the Two Pair contest, in Akkadian glyptic. It is my view that the introduction of new types of sealed artifacts may have stimulated the development of variant imagery in order to convey different and/or new kinds of information related to these sealed artifacts, and to the overall administrative system within which they functioned.



Figure 1: Lapis lazuli cylinder seal from Adab and modern impression: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Ur-Tur, ensi of Adab.” Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago A526. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

The Akkadian Glyptic Tradition

Although the archaeological record of the Akkadian period is sparse, the list of kings, their relationships, and the events of their rule are relatively straightforward (for details, see Westenholz 1999; McMahon 2012). Sargon, the founder of the Dynasty, is credited with uniting the Early Dynastic cities of Sumer and Akkad and initiating a program of expansion that was continued by his sons and successors Rimush and Manishtushu, and which reached its apogee under his grandson Naram-Sin. This increase in power and territory from the reigns of Sargon through Naram-Sin was a gradual process, and innovations usually ascribed to the Akkadians in general actually occurred during the reign of Naram-Sin. The political structure collapsed under Naram-Sin’s successor, Sharkalisharri, and the somewhat rapid decline of the Dynasty included a period of seeming chaos. The last two rulers, Dudu and Shuturul, ruled a much-reduced realm.

The identification of glyptic art associated with the Dynasty of Akkade occurred as early as 1883 (Menant 1883: 71–83). The first seals categorized as Akkadian were inscribed with the names of persons known to have lived in the historical Akkadian period.¹ These pieces of glyptic, which included both inscribed seals and sealings impressed with inscribed seals, formed the foundation for the identification of an Akkadian glyptic tradition.² The projects of cataloguing ancient Near Eastern glyptic

¹ These early seals appeared on the art market; the first seal Menant discusses is the seal of Ibni-sharrum, now in the Louvre. The first excavated seal impressions were from Tello and were published by Delaporte in 1920, but some had been mentioned in the excavation reports starting in 1910.

² A problem of Akkadian glyptic studies as a whole is the overreaching use of the term “style” to describe the glyptic of the historical Akkadian period. While a large corpus of glyptic can be associated with the period of time of the Dynasty of Akkade, many different subjects, depicted in varying compositions, and engraved in more than one manner, are represented in this corpus. I use the term

in various collections that soon followed classified Akkadian seals as such. When the definition of a continuous and linear sequence of glyptic art became the focus of studies in ancient Near Eastern art history in the 1930s and 1940s, the contest scene was the primary subject of investigation for the third millennium BCE (Frankfort 1939; Moortgat 1935, 1940; Porada 1948). Using stylistic analysis as a tool for organizing the glyptic into groups, developmental stages of the contest scene were identified and their chronological positions were ascertained through stratigraphic and epigraphic evidence. Later studies focused only on Akkadian glyptic in order to further define its stylistic development (Boehmer 1964, 1965; Dittman 1994; Nagel and Strommenger 1968). In particular, Boehmer's work, which provided a thorough classification of Akkadian period glyptic, attempted to establish typological sequences within seals grouped by subject matter based on details of the engraving and design elements. He established a periodization of these sequences that was anchored by inscribed pieces, presenting a complex narrative based on a developmental pattern that applied to all types of imagery but was best seen in the contest scene.

Although a wide range of subject matter is represented in glyptic in the Akkadian period, contest scenes predominate (Boehmer 1965; Rakic 2003). The seals and sealings depicting contests provide a large set of imagery for study, which is in part why they have been the basis for reconstructing the development of an Akkadian tradition. However, one issue to consider is that past studies have equated chronological stages with stylistic groups, in part obfuscating the presence of multiple styles that may overlap chronological stages, or that may help better define these chronological stages. Stylistic variation was not addressed by earlier scholars such as Frankfort, whose approach established only the broad stylistic differences that could be attributed to chronological variation, or Boehmer, whose approach identified diagnostic traits for the developmental phases. In one exception to this general approach, a distinctive style of linear engraving in flat relief with severely angular contours, which contrasted with the usually distinctive modeled treatment of forms, has been recognized in Akkadian glyptic (for a detailed study see Laird 1984). The following analysis sets the groundwork for an interpretation of the development of the contest scene in the Akkadian period that considers not only chronological distinctions, but also other factors which might have influenced the use and production of this most popular subject matter (see Rakic 2003 for the full study and definition of the body of material studied).

tradition as the term embraces these varied distinctions yet still binds the group of this related material (for a useful discussion of style and tradition see Feldman 2002: 6–8). While I consider stylistic variation in the corpus to a certain extent below, a fruitful avenue for further research beyond the scope of this essay would be a more in-depth investigation of how the term “style” has been used in the description and definition of chronologically-bounded glyptic corpora.

The Contest Scene: Characteristics and Development

The earliest representations of the contest scene on cylinder seals dating from the late fourth millennium seem to concern the protection of domesticated animals from attacks by wild animals, particularly lions (Amiet 1980; Costello 2010). It became an increasingly popular motif in the Early Dynastic period. As its popularity increased, its compositional structure changed from horizontal to increasingly vertical groups of contestants, a development that continued into the Akkadian period. The frieze of interlocking groups of rampant animals and other standing figures has been aptly named the *Figurenband* (Moortgat 1935, after Curtius 1912). There are a limited number of participants of the contest, but they can be combined and arranged in a seemingly endless variety of friezes, and each participant can also be depicted in a variety of attitudes, with individual features carved in different ways. It is often difficult to distinguish between gestures of protection and attack, and sometimes the interaction between figures displays no evident conflict. The emphasis in these contests seems to be a struggle between wild and domesticated animals, with man sometimes interceding, but with no clearly discernible outcome (Hansen 1998: 50).

Contest scenes in the Akkadian period can be divided into groups based on composition – the way in which the different parts of a scene are arranged. In a contest scene, the composition is determined by the placement of the contestants and other design elements. I have chosen composition as an ordering principle, because it is the element most dependent on – and most closely related to – the actual function of the seal. In this view, certain compositions were designed to adhere to the requirements of particular administrative sealing types. In Akkadian glyptic there are four main compositional groups: Multiple Figure, Group of Four, Group of Five, and Two Pair. The Multiple Figure compositional group is made up of a number of variant forms, in which the contestants are grouped together in ways that do not emphasize a central element (Rakic 2003: 98–105) (Fig. 2). These compositions follow in the tradition of the *Figurenband*, in that the contestants form a frieze-like pattern. In general, five or more contestants are represented in distinct groupings, which can consist of various numbers of contestants. Inscriptions appear on few of the examples and were generally added in open spaces of the design, not as part of the planned composition. The overall manner of engraving represented in the Multiple Figure compositional group can be characterized as modeled, and the distinctive linear style is not represented.

The Group of Four compositional group is made up of one primary form and one variant form (Rakic 2003: 105–11). In the primary form, two crossed animals are depicted, each interacting with another animal to its side, while the variant compositional form adds a fifth figure (Fig. 3). There are no inscribed examples, although two or more horizontal lines breaking up the scene appear on a few designs, and many examples have terminal design elements such as vegetation forms, scorpions, or squiggly lines possibly representing snakes. The Group of Five compositional group



Figure 2: Serpentine cylinder seal from Adab and modern impression: Multiple Figure contest composition with inscription, “Dudu, ungal.” Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago A529. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

consists of a primary and four variant forms (Rakic 2003: 111–15). In the primary form a human figure, the hero, is flanked by a pair of horned animals, who are in turn flanked by a pair of lions (Fig. 4). The variant forms include additional figures or other elements. As with the Group of Four compositional group, both the modeled and linear manner of engraving are represented in the Group of Five compositional group.

The Two Pair compositional group depicts a compositional scheme of two pairs of evenly matched contestants, and includes both compositions with a framed inscription and those without an inscription (Rakic 2003: 115–20) (Fig. 1). This design is commonly called the “classic” or “standard” Akkadian contest scene. While there is some variation in the contestants and their poses, the most common form shows the contestants upright, with the interaction between each contestant in a pair restricted to the upper part of the body. The contestants include, most frequently, a human figure paired with a water buffalo, and a bull-man paired with a lion. A framed inscription is vertically positioned in the image field, resulting in a pair on each side. Secondary motifs are restricted to animals, placed below framed inscriptions that are square rather than rectangular and so do not fill the entire vertical image field, or vertical secondary motifs, often vegetal forms, which take the place in the composition usually occupied by the inscription. Variations of the composition in the Two Pair contest sometimes include the inscription as an integral part of a complicated design depicting upturned contestants. A different composition includes only animals shown in confronted pairs.

The engraving style of the Two Pair compositional group is uniformly modeled. While there is variation in the degree of modeling, no examples exist in the linear style. In the finest pieces, details are clearly articulated – in particular the musculature of the heroes and animals – while less carefully worked pieces are more cursory. Although some variation exists in the types of contestants represented, in general these types



Figure 3: Diorite cylinder seal from Ur and modern impression: Group of Four contest composition. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia B16859. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.



Figure 4: Shell cylinder seal from Ur and modern impression: Group of Five contest composition. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia B16890. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

take on an almost stock-like character in the Two Pair compositional group. The nude hero with six curls dominates the group, and his codified representation is a diagnostic feature in itself. Similarly, the lion shown in profile with open mouth, upright tail, and star shaped paws is a standard representation in this group. The bull-man shown en-face and the water buffalo with his large curved horns complete the classic contest.

An analysis of the imagery of the contest scene in Akkadian glyptic underscores the great variability present in this one representational theme. It also highlights the distinctiveness of the Two Pair composition and provides a framework in which to discuss the subject's development. It is clear that the contest scene underwent a significant change from the end of the Early Dynastic to some point in the Akkadian period. This development is particularly clear in very fine seals, which are often

inscribed and commonly belong to the Multiple Figure and the Two Pair compositional groups. For example, in a comparison of seals inscribed with the names of rulers, found in impressions on sealings from Tello (ancient Girsu), the compositional scheme of the contest scene underwent a marked change: the seals of Lugal-Anda and URU-KA-gina (Early Dynastic IIIb) belong to the Multiple Figure compositional group (Fig. 5), while those inscribed with the name of Naram-Sin belong to the Two Pair group (Allotte de la Fu   1908–1913, 1920; Delaporte 1920; see now Rohn 2011 for most recent publication of these seal impressions). While both groups display a richness of execution and meticulous attention to detail to be expected of seals in the royal realm, the manner of engraving underwent a change as well. The modeling of the figures in the latter group achieves a degree of realism, particularly in the rendering of musculature, not even attempted in the former group. The rendering of individual contestants and details has also changed. In the earlier seals, the bull-men are shown in profile with a long curl down their back, in contrast to their en-face representation in the later group dated to Naram-Sin.

In a developmental sequence, the Two Pair contest scene was introduced at some point after the other three compositional groups. The distinctiveness of these contest scenes has often been singled out in studies of glyptic art, as it is here, and these seals are considered the embodiment of the fully developed Akkadian tradition. Although I would argue that they do not constitute a stylistic group, as a compositional type they certainly can be equated with the later part of the Akkadian period. Through an examination of archaeological context (Rakic 2003) the relative position of the Two Pair contest scene in the Akkadian contest corpus has been defined, with its first appearance stratified later than the other compositional groups, indicating that the dominance of the scene should be assigned to the reign of Sharkalisharri. It is less clear how the Group of Four and Group of Five compositional groups fit into a developmental scheme, or if their presence indicated some other factor. I would propose that stylistic variation was a key component in glyptic production during the reigns of Sargon, Rimush, and possibly Manishtushu. At this time different styles of the contest scene were produced, including southern Early Dynastic IIIb designs, Group of Four designs, and some Multiple Figure and Group of Five designs – the variety indicates this was a transitional phase. At some point, perhaps in the reign of Manishtushu, Multiple Figure and Group of Five designs became the dominant compositional type and continued through part of Naram-Sin's reign – an early Akkadian grouping. The Two Pair composition was a relatively late innovation, introduced at the end of Naram-Sin's reign, but reaching the height of popularity during the reign of Sharkalisharri – representing the late Akkadian period.



Figure 5: Drawing of clay sealing from Tello with impression of a cylinder seal: Early Dynastic IIIB Multiple Figure contest composition with inscription, “URU-KA-gina, king of Lagash.” After Cros 1910: 269.

The Development of the Contest Scene and its Link to Sealing Practices

The development of the contest scene culminating in the Two Pair compositional design during the Akkadian period is widely accepted in studies of ancient Near Eastern glyptic art. Various factors behind the changes in the imagery of this subject have been proposed. As already noted, much emphasis has been placed on artistic expression, which resulted in a carving style that demanded more physical space for the figures, in order to accommodate and show off their musculature and details of other features (Frankfort 1939: 80–85; Porada 1948: 19–23; Aruz 2003: 217–18; Nadali and Verderame 2008: 310–13). It has also been suggested that the need to accommodate a longer inscription played a role (Collon 1982: 23). While there must have been more than one factor underlying the creation of this distinctive imagery, one possible source has not been explored. Seals had multiple functions in the ancient Near East, one of which was to create an impression when the seal was rolled on clay. The rolling process of a cylinder seal is directly related to sealing practices. And while sealing practices varied from period to period in the ancient Near East, it was the protocols of sealing – such as who used certain seals, applied in specific contexts, on particular surfaces of sealings and tablets – that can be revealing when studied (Root 2008: 106). One question to ask is whether a relationship existed between a type of sealing itself and the glyptic imagery, and further how, if at all, the requirements of a specific type of sealing might have influenced the development of particular imagery to be used on sealings of this type. This line of inquiry does not exclude the possibility that the choice of imagery was determined by some aspect of the user or impressor’s identity, such as his or her social status, religious or political affiliation, or ethnicity, but rather suggests that imagery itself was created specifically for the user based on the needs of the



Figure 6: Front and back of clay envelope from Nippur with impressions of a cylinder seal: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Ur-Suen, the scribe.” University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia CBS 04681. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

specific administrative procedure of sealing certain objects by the designated owner or impressor of the seal. By examining sealing practices it is possible to explore the idea that different types of sealings may have had different functions within an administration, and therefore would require varied kinds of information, or a different organization of the same information, to be conveyed via the seal impressed on the sealing.

Despite a misconception in the literature that very few exist (Collon 1995: 77), ancient impressions of Akkadian period seals have survived, albeit in smaller number than other time periods. A study of these impressions reveals this was a time of innovation in sealing practices. Four general types of objects impressed with seals can be identified: the closure bulla, the sealed inscribed tablet, the tablet without text, and the bulla-label (Rakic 2003: 289–99). The term closure bulla – a lump of clay that was pressed upon an object to seal it shut, and whose exposed surface could then be impressed with a seal – encompasses closing devices for movable items such as baskets and jars, as well as locks for storage areas with doors that could be sealed. The closure bulla was commonly used throughout the third millennium, and its existence in the Akkadian period represents a continuation of this sealing practice from earlier times (see for example Martin and Matthews 1993; R. Matthews 1991).

Tablets inscribed with cuneiform were sealed at the start of the third millennium, but this practice ended and tablets tend not to be sealed in the Early Dynastic III period preceding the Akkadian period. Although very few sealed tablets have been identified from the Akkadian period, especially compared to the numerous sealed tablets of the following Ur III period, they are important because they reflect the beginnings of a practice that would eventually become common (Fig. 6). Sealed tablets and their envelopes/cases are the most common sealed artifacts from after the Akkadian period until the late first millennium BCE. Sealing a tablet reflects a change in the function of sealing, as the act of rolling out the seal and the impression that

results are directly related to the information transmitted through the writing on the tablet; they serve to authenticate the contents of the text, rather than to control access and indicate ownership (see Ross, this volume).

Similar to a tablet in shape, the tablet without text differs because it is not inscribed with cuneiform. One side of the object is flat and is impressed with the rolling of a seal. The reverse side is slightly curved and smooth, and the sides are likewise not impressed. This type of sealed artifact seems to appear first in the Akkadian period (Fig. 7), and although its function is not known, it was clearly related to viewing a seal design. Zettler (1977, 2007) has suggested these objects were perhaps carried by an agent of the king or other official to prove the authority of a verbal message. A small number of tablets without texts have survived.

Bulla-labels were an innovation of the Akkadian period, and their distinctiveness has been noted (Zettler 1977; D. Matthews 1997) (Fig. 8). These objects are lumps of clay, usually circular in shape, with two flat main surfaces and curved edges. Often a break exists on one of the edges, where there seems to be evidence for string marks and sometimes perhaps crumpled cloth or material. Bulla-labels were sealed on both the flat surfaces and the edges, and could be inscribed with brief cuneiform notations. The existence of string marks indicates that these objects could have been attached to something, but it is impossible to know what. In fact, the string did not necessarily have to physically secure anything at all, in which case the lump of clay impressed with the seal would not actually be “sealing” the object to which it was attached. It has been suggested that these objects were attached by the string to containers and that they functioned as mailing labels, with the destination or character of the container indicated by a cuneiform notation; alternatively, it is possible that they were attached to a corner of a cloth parcel where it had been tied up, and that the goods traveled from one place to another in the course of official business (Zettler 1977, 2007).

The existence of three new types of sealed artifacts indicates that at some point during the Akkadian period the function of sealing expanded and underwent a change. The lack of well documented archaeological contexts for the majority of sealings does not allow for the reconstruction of any specific administration tied to a city, institution, or even archive (see for example studies in other periods: Zettler 1987; Bregstein 1993; Ehrenberg 1999; Reichel 2001). However, it is possible to examine the imagery of the seals impressed upon them, and to consider them in the larger context of the highly developed administration established to manage the domains of the Akkadian state. Sealings that belong in these three categories are in general largely complete and relatively easy to identify, in contrast to closure bullae, which are often fragmentary, making it difficult to accurately identify what the sealing closed. Another feature they share is the legibility of the seal design impressed into the clay surface. In particular, it is the inscription carved on the seal, which is clearly readable on the sealing, and in fact these sealings are predominantly impressed with seals that bear inscriptions. The inscription carries very specific information which even today we can access. Some of the inscriptions belong to a restricted group that



Figure 7: Front and back of tablet without text from Umm el-jir with impression of a cylinder seal on the front: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Warad– son of–.” The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford 1932.344. Courtesy of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.

names the king. Seals with the inscription formula “Royal Name, Personal Name, his servant” (RN PN arad/arád-da-ni or arad/arád-zu) identify the owners of the seals as officials within the state administration (Zettler 1977, 2007; Rohn 2011). Zettler (1977) proposed that they represent a Sargonic royal seal type and were seals of office, their distribution controlled by the king and their use restricted to seal only in the capacity of the servant or retainer of the king. Other inscriptions name officials known from other sources to have functioned within the state administration, but do not name the king.



Figure 8: Front and back of clay bulla label from Adab with impressions of a cylinder seal: Two Pair contest composition with inscription, “Shar-kali-sharri, king of Agade. Tuta-shar-libbish, the queen; Ishar-beli, her majordomo, is her servant.” Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago A1167. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

The administrative structure of the Akkadian state has been the focus of considerable research, and reconstructions have been proposed based on the existence of a sizable body of archival documentation (for an overview of the use of archival documentation in reconstructing administrative systems and the social and economic organization of the Akkadian period, see Foster 1993). Archives survive from Sumer in the south including at Tello (ancient Girsu), Adab, and Nippur, Akkad in the north including at Kish, Umm el-Jir, and Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna), and outlying areas including at Susa and Gasur/Nuzi, and have been classified as family or private; household; and great household archives (Foster 1982; see especially pp. 7–10, from which the following discussion of archive types directly draws). The private archives consist of contracts, notes of debit and credit, of sale and purchase, and accounts of leased property for official purposes. They have a local horizon and the tablets are rounded in shape and have highly individual handwriting. A small number of individuals are named in the texts who are often ethnically uniform and sometimes related. The household and great household archives provide information about the use and administration of land and agricultural production managed by institutions controlled by the Akkadian ruling family and their officials. The household archives consist of a single important circle of documentation such as management of land and draft animals, production and distribution of food, sustenance of people involved in this process, and business transactions, expenditures, and storage of the surplus. They have a local horizon, and the tablets include both roughly written intramural records and more formally written records for presentation to higher authority. The accounting seems to be under the control of one or two key administrators. The great household archives are similar to the household type but the difference is in degree and scope. They include several circles of documentation such as those like the household records, and also industrial, husbandry, commercial, and military records.

They have a very wide horizon, perhaps including even a whole region, and the shape and writing of tablets can vary. Documents composed in the inner circle of administrators at the very top of the hierarchy tend to be written with unusual care and neatness while less important records are less neat. There are numerous administrators involved, and a political ruler can appear as a principal, suggesting that the records belong to a center of both political and economic importance. Record-keeping procedures can be complicated, and a sophisticated system of archival storage can exist.

The archival documentation was transformed as a result of a major reform of the bureaucratic system, which was thought to have occurred within a brief period of time during the reign of Naram-Sin (Visicato 2000: 8). Texts and archives are thus generally assigned to either an Early Sargonic group – the time of the first three rulers, Sargon, Rimush, and Manishtushu, a category grouped with Presargonic documentation because the methods of accounting and the overall administrative organization were so similar – and a Classical Sargonic group. The reforms seem to indicate a need for the centralization of the management of the state, which had become too unwieldy, and resulted in decisive changes in the recording systems. The documentation shows a trend toward greater unification reflected in such things as a standard system of units of measurements, a uniform script, and standardized details of record keeping.

Another feature of the administrative system is that certain practices broke down local boundaries (Foster 1986: 48). For example, certain categories of records within an administrative archive were intended to be examined by outside imperial inspectors. These tablets were designed to present how much of what type of crown property was held or used by whom, and often added information on why and when. They differ in appearance and content from records kept as vouchers or records of intramural interest. The records meant to be inspected by outside authorities – the royal agents – not only had a standardized form and content, but were written in the imperial writing style. Such standardization of records was necessary, since the royal agent needed to be able to understand the records from any locality. As the Akkadian Dynasty's power and area of control expanded, the need for standardization in the management of its domains increased. In turn, this standardization facilitated the process of expansion by increasing the efficiency of the state bureaucracy.

Sealings impressed with Akkadian seals participated in this administrative system. In particular the evidence suggests that the bulla-label sealing type had a role in the administration of the state. Bulla-labels were impressed with seals that were in almost every case inscribed, and the inscriptions frequently named officials associated with the state administration. Moreover, they have a wide geographical distribution, with the majority found at Tello but examples also from Adab, Tell Brak, Susa and perhaps Gasur (Rakic 2003), and some have cuneiform notations written on them indicating relations between officials. The manner in which the seals were impressed on the bulla-labels indicates that the same choice was repeatedly made,

over many discrete applications, which itself suggests a conscious decision (Root 2008: 109). The inscription carved on the seal was the focus of the impression, appearing at the center of the bulla label surface almost at the expense of the imagery. It is the inscription that clearly carries the “important” information in regards to the sealing. Furthermore, this information is very specific – it has one reading or meaning. The inscription identifies an individual and even today we can read the inscription and know the name of that individual. While the imagery certainly also carried and transmitted information, this communication is more open-ended, and its meaning is ambiguous to us today. The impressed seals depicted contest scenes, and, to a lesser extent, presentation scenes.³

The contest scenes carved on seals impressed on the three new types of sealed artifacts in the Akkadian period were almost always the Two Pair compositional group. The bulla-label in fact was an ideal medium for this compositional design in which the imagery framed and highlighted the inscription. However, the imagery of the Two Pair contest itself was quite distinct. With a limited number of participants, and their almost stock representation, these seals were easily recognizable. Officials of the Akkadian administration were involved with different aspects of its management, and as such their identities and actions needed to be easily recognizable. I would propose that the classic Two Pair contest scene can be understood as a standardization of the contest scene, akin to the standardization of weights and measures and writing styles that occurred at some point during the reign of Naram-Sin. The production of these seals was most likely controlled by the court, and the information they carried indicated that their owners and users participated in the state administration. At this same time there is a notable increase in the number of inscribed seals, and it is clear that the inscription itself was a key feature of the Two Pair contest. While the imagery is almost interchangeable the inscription is distinct. Perhaps the need to include on a seal the information the inscription carried and communicated was stimulated by the change in sealing practices. The Two Pair contest scene was not only the embodiment of the fully developed Akkadian glyptic carving style but can furthermore be considered an emblem of the Akkadian administration communicating information through imagery and words.

3 The presentation scene showing figures standing before a seated or standing deity first appeared in the Akkadian period (Haussperger 1991), when there were many forms of this theme. Some scenes depicted recognizable gods such as Shamash or Ea, while in many the deity is unrecognizable. In the Ur III period the presentation scene, which itself developed several standardized formats in response to the creation of a highly centralized bureaucratic state, replaced the contest scene in popularity (Zettler 2007). Gibson and McMahon (1995: 14) have suggested that Akkadian presentation scene seals served as private seals to be used in private transactions. Felli (2006), in an in depth study of the imagery on two related seals belonging to an ensi of Lagash during the reigns of Naram-Sin and Sharkalisharri that depict one variation of a presentation scene, considers these seals as seals of office.

Conclusion

It is clear that the most popular subject matter of Akkadian seals, the contest scene, underwent a transformation over the course of the Dynasty's history. This imagery evolved from a frieze of interlocking groups of rampant animals and other standing figures, into a composition with two pairs of contestants flanking a framed inscription. However an analysis of the contest scene reveals the great variability present in this one representational theme as well as the existence of four main compositional groups: Multiple Figure, Group of Four, Group of Five, and Two Pair. The distinctiveness of the Two Pair composition is also evident, and the fact that it was a relatively late innovation, introduced at the end of Naram-Sin's reign, but reaching the height of popularity during the reign of Sharkalisharri, is significant. Rather than understanding the changes in the subject as a product of artistic expression, where the demand for more physical space for the figures in order to accommodate and show off their musculature and details of other features resulted in the distinctive Two Pair contest scene, this essay has attempted to ground the discussion in the actual function of the seal by examining sealing practices. When the Two Pair contest scene is viewed in ancient impressions it appears that the inscription is privileged; the images have a secondary role and are sometimes not even impressed and visible. The composition of the scene is integral to producing this effect. Thus changes in the visual expression of a particular subject, the contest scene, are considered as a response to the nature of sealing practice, which itself underwent a transformation during the Akkadian period. The introduction of new types of sealed artifacts, such as bulla-labels and inscribed tablets most likely predicated the need for a seal to carry different information or to communicate information in a new way.

The administrative structure of the state was an economic management strategy that, along with military, ideological, and political strategies, allowed for the consolidation of power and rule of Mesopotamia by the Dynasty of Akkade. Changes in glyptic imagery and sealing practices were essentially new modes of control and communication within the Akkadian state, stimulated by the requirements of managing goods and people over ever-greater areas of land. The contest scene carried information about the power of the Dynasty and the position the owner held within the administration of the state as well as often identifying that individual by name. The Two Pair contest can be understood as a standardization of the contest scene, akin to the standardization of weights and measures and writing styles that occurred at some point during the reign of Naram-Sin, and the production of these seals was most likely controlled by the court. Whether in the northern floodplain (the heartland of Akkad), in the frequently contentious south (Sumer) or in the outlying areas where there were outposts such as Tell Brak and Susa, seals with the Two Pair contest scenes signaled that their owners and users participated in the state administration functioning for the ruling authority while at the same time broadcasting Akkadian power.

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Joanna S. Smith

Histories of Cypriot Art through Seal Carving

Abstract: During the Bronze and Iron Ages of the ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean there are few artists who are known by name. Histories of art often rely exclusively on archaeological sources. Who made what, why, and for whom usually must be inferred. But what do the objects created suggest about who made them and why? This question is explored especially with respect to Cyprus where scholarly ideas about its arts regularly draw on perceived similarities to arts of the ancient Near East, Egypt, Anatolia, and the Aegean. Detailed art histories are contained within the smallest of art forms on the island. Stamp and cylinder seals were small, usually stone objects that served administrative, legal, and protective purposes. Known ancient words for seals speak to the long-term authority encapsulated by cylinders as contrasted with stamps. In the Late Bronze and Iron Ages on Cyprus this longevity is manifest in that many cylinder designs were recarved up to four and even five times to suit new owners over the course of hundreds of years. As layered images they reveal ancient artistic encounters and the resulting choices made in different socio-political contexts. Cypriot choices for seal designs can inform us about artistic ideas that were island-wide or specific to regions, cities, and even families. Considering objects and images as products of more than one moment in time is useful not just for the study of Cypriot seals, but also other art forms.

Keywords: Cyprus, Akaki, Alassa, Enkomi, Episkopi, Kition, Kourion, cylinder seals, seals, Iron Age, Late Bronze Age, archaeology, art history, encounter, recarving, things

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Introduction

On Cyprus, as in much of the ancient Near East and eastern Mediterranean, histories of art rely on archaeological sources. Who made what, why, and for whom must usually be inferred. Texts rarely reveal direct statements about the significance of specific objects or images. Objects, however, can suggest much about who made them and why. Ideas held by craftspeople can be partly revealed through the close examination of their artistic creations. Especially informative are objects that are the products of more than one period of manufacture, as in architectural redesign, modifications by hand of mold-made terracottas, and recarved stone sculptures. Iconographic, structural, and contextual changes preserve evidence for how people reacted to and reinterpreted objects and images made by those who came before.

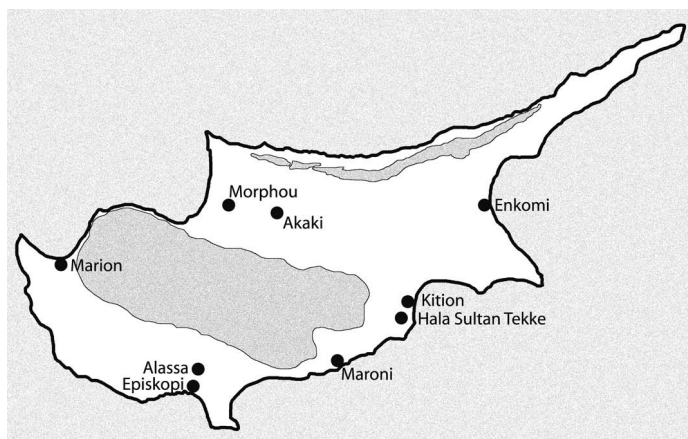


Figure 1: Map of Cyprus showing sites mentioned in the text.

When people in the past encountered the objects that they sought to reinvent, they made choices about how to add to, subtract from, modify, enhance, preserve, obliterate, or otherwise alter the pieces. In those moments of encounter, the objects became malleable things (Brown 2003; Brown 2004) that captured evidence for those changes. When we observe and evaluate such modified objects in our present, as things, they have the potential to reveal changes made in the past. We then seek causal reasons for how and why objects were modified by placing them in their total cultural and environmental contexts. Patterns that we find across space and time among these alterations allow us one way of articulating critical image-based art histories for the ancient world. The concept of there being an idea in a thing, meaning that an object is instrumental (Gell 1998) in the choice a person makes during an encounter with that object, is an area of material culture research that has already proved to be important for ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean art and archaeology. When applied to object reuse and reinvention, ideas invested in them as things afford us a way of being explicit about how we choose to construct art histories through our own encounters with ancient works of art and why those histories have the potential to be meaningful about thoughts, desires, and conceptions held in the past.

This approach is used here for art histories of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age gleaned from the smallest of art forms, seals. On Cyprus (Fig. 1), seals of many shapes, materials, and designs come from tombs, sanctuaries, houses, and workshops. The extensive excavation, especially of Late Bronze Age settlements, on the island provides a rich contextual picture for the uses of seals (Smith 2012c). Furthermore, evidence for the reuse, including the recarving, of seals presents evidence for the history of art on the island. The layers of carving on a single cylinder seal, sometimes recarved up to four or five times, can span half a millennium and suggest how artists reacted to images made on Cyprus or abroad, sometimes by artists several generations before. This history can be traced within single houses and settlements, but also

across and among regions, and with places outside of Cyprus. Patterns detected so far point to design changes ca. 1200 BCE that relate to political changes on the island.

Cypriot Art

Cyprus is often described as a crossroads in the eastern Mediterranean. Even before the development of long-distance seafaring during the Late Bronze Age, its geographical position led it to become a center for connections among peoples of the Near East and Mediterranean. Modern visitors from the nineteenth century onwards found its arts intriguing, often puzzling, and sometimes off-putting for being neither precisely Greek nor fully Near Eastern (Childs 2012: 11). Early on, there was an emphasis in scholarship that Cypriot art reflects connections with its geographical neighbors. For example, Max Ohnefalsch-Richter, who arrived on Cyprus in 1878 just after Cyprus was transferred from the Ottomans to the British, published his account of excavations on the island under a title that referenced sources both east and west, *Kypros: The Bible and Homer* (1893). The Swedish Cyprus Expedition, a four-man team that conducted excavations across the island from 1927 to 1931, came with the aim to study “the part played by Cyprus as a connecting link between the early Eastern and Western cultures.”¹ They found that “its culture was exposed to various waves of influence from the highly developed neighboring civilizations of Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, Ionia, and Greece” (Gjerstad et al. 1934: xiv). Scholars still regularly frame their research designs with reference to the multi-cultural dimensions of ancient Cypriot society.

The contents of the many tombs and temples unearthed by Luigi Palma di Cesnola (1877) and his successors at the end of the 19th and into the 20th century form the core of many Near Eastern and Greco-Roman museum collections. Objects found by Cesnola became the initial basis of the ancient collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Karageorghis et al. 2000: 7), and other pieces found by him are in many ancient collections, especially in the United States, even small college and university study collections (Karageorghis et al. 2000: 8).

After their initial prominence, Cypriot collections took second place to objects from Greece, Italy, Syria, and Iraq. However, an initiative by Vassos Karageorghis, long-time Director of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, especially during his tenure at the A. G. Leventis Foundation, was instrumental in bringing Cypriot objects to new prominence in museum collections around the world (Karageorghis 2007: 183–95), from the United States (Karageorghis et al. 2000) and Canada (Karageorghis 2003a) to Europe (for example, Karageorghis 2001) and Russia (Karageorghis and Bukina 2005). Objects

¹ This quotation is from a letter written by Sigurd Curman, the King’s Custodian of Antiquities in Sweden, requesting permission in 1926 for a Swedish archaeological expedition to Cyprus. It is preserved in the State Archives, Nicosia, Cyprus, no. SA1/1466/1926/5–4.

have been conserved, revealing decorative details thought lost or never before noticed (for example, Hendrix 2001). Work with archival records has revealed new information about their find contexts (for example, Brehme 2001; Karageorghis 2003b). Digital resources, such as the British Museum online research database (BM web; Kiely ed.) and a digital initiative by the Cyprus Museum (Pilides 2012; www.enkomicm.org), make the collections more easily accessible, facilitating their restudy and reevaluation.

Even with this resurgence, the arts of ancient Cyprus are still regularly perceived in relationship to the arts of its neighbors: the Aegean, Egypt, Anatolia, the Near East, especially Syria and the Levant, but also Mesopotamia, and Italy. This comparison is warranted in part because Cyprus was, at times, under the control or sway of political powers in continental Asia, Africa, or Europe. There are also, of course, many imported objects on Cyprus. Classical Greek pottery first attracted many excavators to the island (as at ancient Marion, Munro and Tubbs 1890), and most excavations of a Bronze or Iron Age site reveal Egyptian jewelry and amulets (Jacobsson 1994). Also Cypriot objects, especially ceramic vessels, were exported to all parts of the Mediterranean (for example, Karageorghis ed. 2001; Schreiber 2003). Cypriot objects incorporate motifs and shapes drawn from many sources, such as Mycenaean pottery (for example, Kling 1989). As far back as the Neolithic, stone tool makers drew on habits that originated in the Levant (Peltenburg et al. 2001). Anatolian features in pottery and other forms of material culture began to appear in the Philia phase of the Early Bronze Age (Webb and Frankel 1999). Architectural design in the Bronze Age recalls aspects of both Syrian and Minoan buildings (Hult 1983; Hitchcock 1999). Direct imports from Mesopotamia and Iran are rare and are mainly in the form of seals (Merrillees 1986; Smith 2012a), but the influence of Near Eastern fashions is preserved especially in dress during the Iron Age (Karageorghis 1993: 82–101). The creators of metal vessels drew on Phoenician ideas (Markoe 1985) as did makers of Iron Age seals (Reyes 2001). Outside Cyprus, the creators of faience vessels (Caubet 2007), seals (Pini 1980), and many other objects drew on Cypriot designs.

At the same time, the arts of Cyprus are unique (Gjerstad et al. 1934: xiv). William Childs (2012: 12) describes Cypriot art as “an independent vision of the world that is striking in its forceful expression of those elements of the visual world that were considered worthy of record.” While there are visual cues that would have been familiar to those from mainland and other island cultures, Cypriot images reflect beliefs, aesthetic preferences, and socio-political ideas on Cyprus. Cypriot artists were masters of transformation. They shaped their visual world by merging, recontextualizing, and literally reshaping images and objects.

For example, in his work on Cypriot sculpture, Derek Counts took on the problem of scholarship that privileges the foreign over the local in Cypriot art. Using the concept of hybridity, he showed how Cypriot artists who fashioned master of animals sculptures merged ideas about many deities within their own cultural context that referenced a single male god (Counts 2008). In studying art forms that resulted from intense cultural interconnection, it is important neither to separate firmly nor to

privilege what is thought to be local as opposed to foreign. They are the products of a process of interaction and exclusion (Feldman 2006: 61). In sourcing the materials, identifying forms and motifs, and evaluating associations among motifs and objects, each scholar needs to lay out the criteria by which he or she perceives ancient and modern categories of type or style to be relevant (Winter 2005). The study of Cypriot art requires an in-depth knowledge not just of art works on Cyprus, but also those of their neighbors. Historians of Cypriot art need to consider both on-island and off-island ideas.

To evaluate ancient ideas about Cypriot art during the Bronze and Iron Ages it would be helpful to have ancient texts that mention specific artworks, ideas about them, and the artists that created them. There are, however, rarely documents that comment on ancient Cypriot art. Best known is the third century CE work, *The Deipnosophists*, which names two Cypriot weavers, Akesas and Helicon, who wove a tapestry for the first Great Panathenaia after the end of the war between Persia and Greece in the fifth century BCE (Barber 1992: 114). The near lack of ancient commentary on Cypriot artworks is not surprising since it is rare for artists to be singled out by name in connection with specific works of art in the Bronze and early Iron Ages of the Near East and Mediterranean overall.²

The few contemporary references on Cyprus to craftsmen by name date to the fourth and third centuries BCE. Whether any created figural art is unclear (Masson 1985; Karageorghis 2006: 227–235). As with Akesas and Helicon, the only inscriptions linking the name of a craftsman with an object have been found outside Cyprus at Delphi and Naucratis on objects of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE (Karageorghis 2006: 229–230, 232). The range of crafts attested archaeologically on Cyprus is wide (Karageorghis 2006), and it is sometimes possible to determine something about the gender of artists and the contexts in which they worked.³

By the sixth century BCE on Cyprus, imported Attic painted pottery arrived bearing the names of Greek artists (Gjerstad et al. 1977). Similarly by fifth century BCE, some seals on the island were made by or have been attributed to named Greek artists such as Semon, who signed a scarab found at Troy (Boardman 1968: 94–96). Seals were inscribed in the Late Bronze Age with signs of the still undeciphered Cypro-Minoan script(s) (Masson 1957; Smith 2002: 10–16). In the Archaic and Classical periods, some were inscribed with the names of their owners (Catling 1972; Smith 2002: 16–19). However, most Cypriot seal carvers as well as seal owners remain nameless. Even without knowing the names connected with them, these small, highly personal objects offer remarkably detailed views into Cypriot artistic ideas and how people there perceived images from their past and far distant places.

² Gates 1990; Sasson 1990. The sculptor, Thutmose, at Tell el-Amarna is a rare example of an artist whose place of work and specific works are known (Freed 1999: 123–26; Baines 2007: 328–30).

³ Bolger and Serwint 2002; Smith 2009: 234–43.

Cypriot Seals and Recarving

Often made of stone, seals were used as amulets and tools for asserting responsibility or authority in economic and legal contexts when impressed in clay or wax. On Cyprus during the Late Bronze Age the most common seal shape was the cylinder, a shape especially prevalent in third- and second-millennium BCE Mesopotamia and Syria. Stamp seals were also used on Cyprus, especially toward the end of the Bronze Age. Scarabs, sometimes mounted on rings, were first imported to Cyprus from Egypt and become the predominant Cypriot seal form in the Archaic and Classical periods (Smith 2013). Stamp seals on Cyprus take many shapes, including the conoid, the scarab, and the multi-sided cubical stamp, sometimes with a handle at the top.

Stone cylinder seals are especially revealing about changes in artistic ideas through time because they were often recarved. Artists removed, added to, replaced, and altered earlier carvings. As stamps became prevalent, especially in the first millennium BCE, some cylinder seals were designed at the outset to serve as both cylinder and stamp, or were adapted in shape and carving to be more similar to flat-sided stamp seals (Smith 2003a). Stamps were rarely recarved (Smith 2012e: cat. no. 145), but they were often reset, typically to transform them from pendants into ring settings (for example, Kenna 1968).

Ancient Near Eastern and Greek terminology for seal shapes reveals aspects of meaning that suggest that there were different ideas attached to cylinder and stamp seals. These words are plausibly relevant for Cyprus because of Cypriot connections with those who wrote and spoke Akkadian and Greek. The language(s) of the Late Bronze Age Cypriot script(s) called Cypro-Minoan are unknown; most Iron Age Cypriot syllabic inscriptions read as Greek. Cypro-Minoan was used at Ugarit in Syria alongside Akkadian and Ugaritic, and the method of inscribing often bears similarity to punched cuneiform writing; some Cypro-Minoan inscriptions are wedge-shaped and some Ugaritic ones are rounded, possibly impressed by an implement similar to that used for many Cypro-Minoan inscriptions (Smith 2003c). There are a few Semitic-language inscriptions from Late Bronze Age contexts on Cyprus.⁴

The cylinder seal manifests specific ideas about “durable” (Hallo 1983: 14), continuous power. The Akkadian noun, *kunukku* (CAD 8: 543–48), meaning cylinder seal, is related to words for stability, legitimacy, or establishment (CAD 8: 159–71, 540, 543) and thus contains the idea of the longevity of authority. This term may be related phonetically to the word for stamp seal or seal ring, *unqu* (CAD 20: 167–71). In Greek, the term *sphragis* (σφραγίς), refers to a seal, its impression, or any mark with reference to a stamped design. The “punctual” (Hallo 1983: 14) or final import of a stamp is

⁴ Especially see Åström and Masson 1982 and Merrillees 1986. Some Akkadian texts may even have been written on the island (Goren et al. 2004; but see Merrillees 2011).

conveyed by the verb, *sphragidso* (σφραγίζω), which means not only to approve or confirm, but also to set an end to or close up.

The Greek term *ὄνυχ*, referring to a gem, seal, or finger nail, is equivalent to the Mycenaean term, *o-nu-ke*, in Linear B (Aura Jorro 1993: 28–29) and possibly also the Akkadian term for stamp seal or seal ring, *unqu*. A word for stamp seal may have been shared across the Near East and Mediterranean.⁵ Certainly by the first millennium BCE on Cyprus, when Greek was spoken on the island and written in the Cypriot syllabary, Greek vocabulary for seals might have been well understood, even though the specific terms have not yet been attested in writing on Cyprus.

Given that these words for seals were probably current on Cyprus, it is, therefore, important that it was the intaglio carving on the cylinder seal, not the stamp seal, which was often recarved, building on and shifting ideas about established forms of long-lived power in the Near East (Smith, forthcoming). Many stone cylinder seals were recarved in antiquity in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Syria, the Levant, Cyprus, and even Egypt and the Aegean. By changing the inscription or image on a seal, the relationship between a seal and its impression was transformed. However, this did not always lead to a complete break from the seal as it had appeared in the past. On Late Bronze Age Cyprus both inscriptions and figures that formed intaglio seal designs were frequently altered.⁶ Cypriot seal stones are usually of imported materials, some of which were initially carved outside the island.⁷ Thus, their patterns of recarving especially define the variety of seal designs that were carved on the island rather than elsewhere.

On recarved seals, changes to inscriptions and figural designs were not random. Unlike inscriptions, however, where normally the earlier inscription is not readable below the later one, with figural recarving it is often possible to reconstruct two or more designs on the surface of a single seal. Analogy with similar seals may help to define the original design. Parsing the layers of carving can show how the seal carvers through time built on older designs, preserving and using older figural elements or removing and effacing them. The more a seal design builds on elements from past carvings, the more likely it is that the new owners were deliberately drawing on the long-term authority invested in a seal, demonstrating continuity with the past. When new designs replaced or undermined designs from the past, the more likely it is that the new owners were deliberately usurping, as through conquest, the power invested in the older seal. In both cases the older recarved seal could be considered more authentic than a new one. It is in how the recarvings changed designs over time that one can detect continuities and discontinuities in power structures (Smith 2012b).

5 There are a few other connections between Akkadian vocabulary and words in the early form of Greek found on the Linear B tablets in the Aegean, especially among words for textiles (Barber 1975: 317; Smith 2012f: 243, 245–46).

6 Smith 2003b; Smith 2012b; Smith 2012d.

7 Merrillees 1986; Joyner et al. 2006; Merrillees 2006; Merrillees 2009.



Figure 2: Greenish-gray soft stone cylinder seal and its modern impression from Kition, Cyprus. Its earlier and later carvings are visible, with the latest carvings being sharper and cutting the earlier ones. Area I, Well 17, no. 1118. Height 2.38 cm. Cyprus Museum, Nicosia. Photographs courtesy of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.

Normally, the inscription or figures of one design appear to be cut by newly carved signs or figures (Fig. 2). Recarved images result in patterns that can be separated into layers of carving, akin to stratified layers of earth in archaeological deposits with one deposit cutting into another (Fig. 3). These layers make it possible to figure out which parts of a design are earlier and which are later. There can be several instances of recarving on one seal surface. The original design is often less sharp than the recarved elements. Being worn or purposely abraded, it may survive only in traces in the background of a scene.

Recarving does not, however, always interrupt the engraved lines and drill marks already on the seal. New figures or inscriptions may be squeezed into uncarved portions of the seal surface. Detection of recarving in these cases often relies on differences of style and the presence of unexpected features in a standard scene. Wear on the seal is another indicator. The stringhole is often off center (Collon 2005: 122), pointing to sections of the seal that were reworked. The height and diameter may also be uneven, pointing to areas that were subject to change.

In order to figure out the relationship among the parts, it is effective to create a drawing that allows for the layers of carving to be viewed together as a final product (Fig. 3a), but also pulled apart into the different stages of carving, from earliest to latest. This can be shown by using different colors or different shades of gray in a single drawing (Fig. 3d), with the lightest shade used for the oldest carving and the darkest, usually black, used for the latest. Alternatively this same approach to coloring may be used to show changes in the seal through a sequence of drawings (Fig. 3b–d), from earliest to latest, each drawing with successively more features as the final design comes into focus.

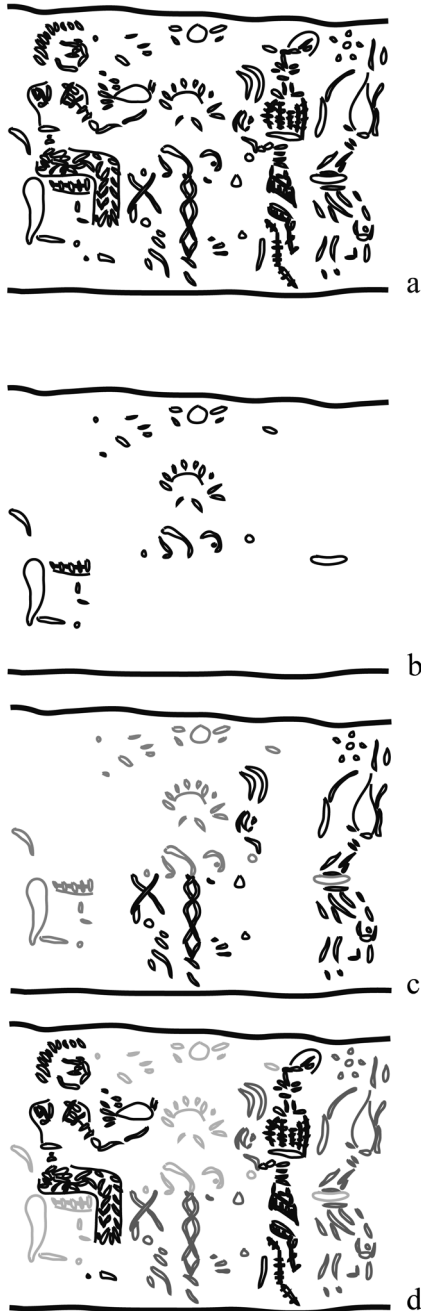


Figure 3: Layered images on the cylinder seal from Kition shown in figure 2: (a) all traces of carving; (b) remains of earliest design in two registers; (c) remains in (b) with remains of a second carving depicting a master or mistress of animals scene; and (d) remains in (b-d) integrated into the final scene of a seated figure; shades of gray and black used to detail earlier and later carvings of each stage shown in b-d. Drawings by J. S. Smith.

The examples that follow center on the Late Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age. We have the most detailed evidence for layers of images on seals in the Late Bronze Age because of the predominance of the cylinder seal at that time. Cypriot choices for the design and use of seals can inform us about artistic ideas within households, cities, and regions, and even across the island. Much remains to be learned through seal stratigraphies, especially how the arts of the Iron Age built on designs from the past and how Cypriot recarved seals found outside the island relate to patterns detected on Cyprus.

Household

Late Bronze Age domestic structures appear to represent the houses of single household groups, some of which had great access to wealth. Because these buildings are thought to have been family residences, even if there were visitors for social or economic reasons, most of the objects found deposited in the structures are likely to have been related to activities conducted there. Seals have been found in some of these buildings, and, in a few cases, several seals come from the same house, sometimes from different periods of deposition. By considering all the seals found in these buildings, including tombs that formed parts of some household areas, a stratigraphy of seal carving emerges that can illustrate changes over time and connections with seals found in other parts of the same settlement.

One good example of such a stratigraphy of seal carvings emerges from the study of a Late Bronze to early Iron Age household at Kition (Fig. 4), a large coastal settlement on the south coast of Cyprus. Kition has been partly excavated to reveal tombs, cult buildings, a harbor site, workshops, and houses.⁸ One house was completely excavated by the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus at Kition-Chrysopolitissa (Area I), a part of the ancient city located 200 meters from the harbor site of Kition-Kathari (Area II) where workshops, temples, and administrative structures were found.

Two cylinder seals and one wooden roller-impressed basin rim were found inside the building (Porada 1985). One cylinder (Cyprus Museum I/223/1)⁹ came from the earliest floor level, Floor IV (ca. 1300–1190 BCE), in an area of bronzeworking. The other cylinder (Cyprus Museum I/1118)¹⁰ and the impression (Larnaca Museum I/1153)¹¹ were found in wells. A further three cylinder seals, two gold rings, and three Egyptian scarabs were found in Tomb 9. This tomb is located in the courtyard of the Floor IV

⁸ Demas 1985; Karageorghis 1985; for a reinterpretation of the dating and purpose of many of these structures see Smith 2009: 31–76, 164–219.

⁹ Karageorghis 1985: 5; Porada 1985: 251, pl. A.2; Smith 2009: 40, 74, fig. II.9e.

¹⁰ Karageorghis 1985: 86; Porada 1985: 250–51, pl. A.1; Smith 2009: 71, 74–75, fig. II.22a.

¹¹ Karageorghis 1985: 82–83; Porada 1985: 253–54, pl. B; Smith 2009: 71, fig. II.22b.

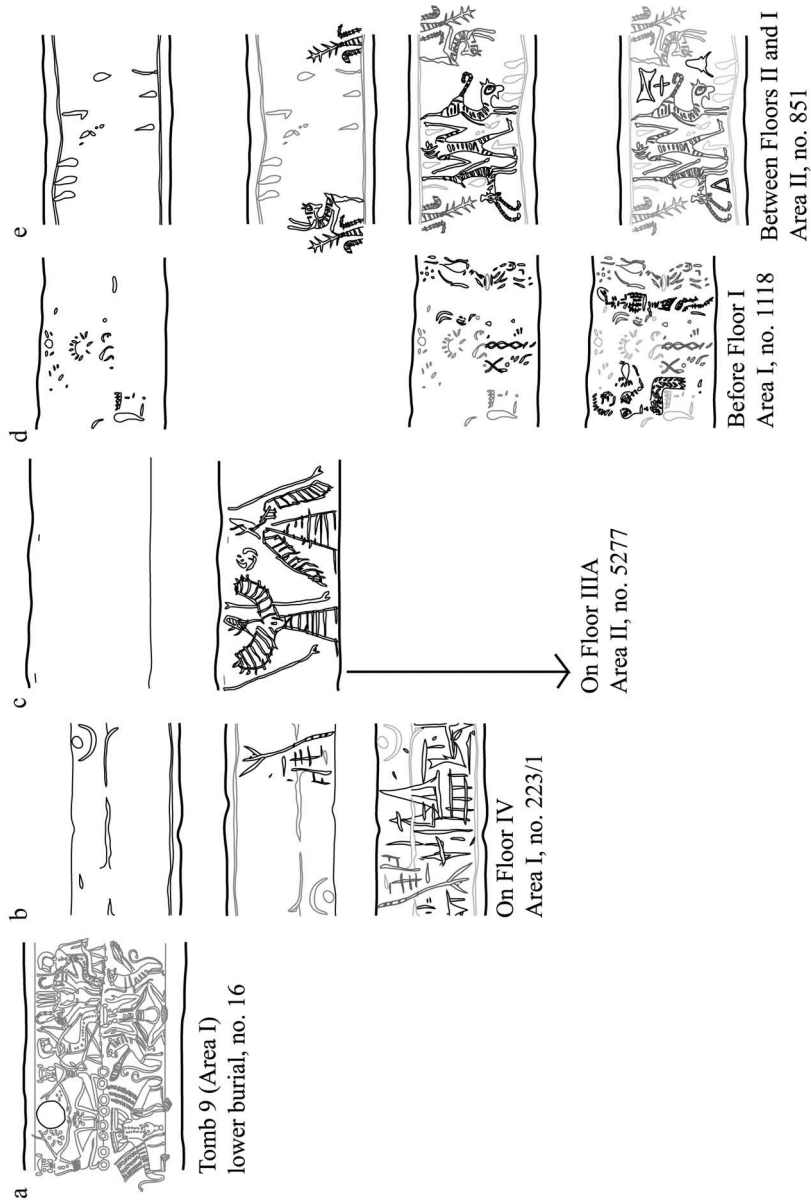


Figure 4: Stages of carving on five cylinder seals from Kition, Cyprus, showing the earliest traces of carving at the top and the latest forms of carving at the bottom: (a) [Area I] Tomb 9, lower burial, no. 16. Hematite. Height 3.15 cm.; (b) Area I, no. 223/1, on Floor IV. Soft black stone. Height 2.13 cm.; (c) Area II, no. 5277, from Floor IIIA. Soft gray stone. Height 2.33 cm.; (d) Area I, no. 1118, from Well 17. Greenish-gray soft stone. Height 2.38 cm.; (e) Area II, no. 851, from between Floors II and I. Soft black stone. Height 2.45 cm. All in the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia. Drawings by J. S. Smith.

building.¹² It is contemporary with the use of Floor IV,¹³ but the earlier burials predate the end of that phase of the building's occupation. One gold ring (Cyprus Museum T9/lb/10)¹⁴ and one cylinder (Cyprus Museum T9/lb/16)¹⁵ were found in a lower burial. All the other sealing tools were found in an upper burial.

Of the cylinder seals, the two from the house and the one from the tomb's lower burial were recarved (Fig. 4a–b, d); all three began as seals bearing intaglio designs arranged in two registers. These seals can be viewed both in relationship to one another and to other seals found at Kition, especially two recarved cylinders (Cyprus Museum II/5277 and II/851)¹⁶ (Fig. 4c, e) found at Kition-Kathari. These five recarved cylinder seals reveal a pattern of seal carving spanning at least three hundred years, ca. 1300–1000 BCE, possibly as late as 850 BCE, and highlight continuities in the power held by those in the household excavated at Chrysopolitissa (Smith 2012b: 201–202, fig. 3).

The three recarved cylinder seals found in the house all bear traces of a horizontal line that divided them into two registers of design. The earliest example from Tomb 9 preserves this line most clearly and has hardly been recarved at all (Fig. 4a). Only part of the top register was recarved with a large sphere, possibly to remove an unwanted part of the design or to mask a chip that marred the surface.

The example from Floor IV is deeply carved and, at first glance, appears not to bear obvious figural decoration (Fig. 4b, bottom). However, a disk and crescent remains from one register of the earliest carving (Fig. 4b, top). Also a striding robed figure once formed part of an intermediate design (Fig. 4b, middle). This figure closely parallels robed figures found on a cylinder seal from a courtyard on Floor IIIA (ca. 1190 at the earliest) at Kition-Kathari (Fig. 4c, bottom). The final scene is schematic (Fig. 4b, bottom), but may have been meant to include a schematic figure, shown as a tall conical object, on a chair.

The recarved seal from the latest deposit, a well of Floor I (1000–850 BCE), preserves elements of a two register design (Fig. 4d, top) similar to that on the seal from Tomb 9. It has a sun disk and tree in its upper register and an animal in its lower register. These were all incorporated into the final scene. The intermediate design (Fig. 4d, middle) featured a master or mistress of animals that closely parallels the design of animals held upside-down on a cylinder seal from Kition-Kathari (Fig. 4e, second from bottom) that was found between Floors II and I (before ca. 1000 BCE) in a temple. That seal may also have been carved originally in two registers. The hind leg and haunches of several animal figures remain (Fig. 4e, top);

¹² Karageorghis 1974; Leclant 1974; Porada 1974.

¹³ Demas 1985: 6.

¹⁴ Karageorghis 1974: 44, pl. LXVI; Smith 2009: 115, fig. III.8b.

¹⁵ Karageorghis 1974: 44, pl. LXVI; Porada 1974: 164–66, fig. 2; Smith 2009: 90, 93, fig. III.8a.

¹⁶ Karageorghis 1985: 110; Porada 1985: 251–52, pl. A.3; Smith 2009: 39–41, fig. II.9d and Karageorghis 1985: 197; Porada 1985: 252–53, pl. A.4; Smith 2009: 63–64, fig. II.14c.

if these are traces of a double-register design, it is most unusual for its antithetical arrangement that oriented the figures in the bottom row upright while those at the top were upside-down.

The final scene on the latest cylinder from the house at Chrysopolitissa shows a seated male figure (Fig. 4d, bottom), his chair suggesting that he represents a person of importance. He holds a bird of prey with a leash and a suppliant approaches. Both his seat of power, fashioned out of an animal from the original double-register scene, and the goat offered by the suppliant, originally part of the second design, rely on earlier seal designs, building on their long-term history.

The recarved cylinder seals from Kition-Chrysopolitissa demonstrate how seal owners in one house built on and adapted seal designs from earlier generations. They chose to keep rather than fully obliterate aspects of seal designs even as the structure and subject matter of scenes changed. The double register design was replaced by a scene that fit the full height of the cylinder. Figures paired with reflection symmetry and rows of figures with translation symmetry were refashioned with asymmetrical scenes featuring seated figures, emphasizing a hierarchy of power not evident in the earlier designs.

The seat shown on the earlier example (Fig. 4b, bottom), at the latest ca. 1190 BCE, is a rectilinear, vertically hatched stool lacking a back support that is roughly reminiscent of stools shown on Ur III and Old Babylonian cylinder seals (Simpson 1995: 1648, 1653). It is unclear whether the conical shape on the seat was meant to represent a human. The later example (Fig. 4d, bottom) is more finely carved. There the seat is an animal-shaped throne similar to ivory furniture with animal-shaped legs and inlaid panels as in the Near East (Simpson 1995: 1655–62) and Egypt (Der Manuelian 1995: 1631–33); Phoenician furniture with similar features (Gubel 1987) is contemporary with the final deposit of this cylinder seal in the early decades of the first millennium BCE. The seated man holds a bird of prey, a reference to falconry best known from the Hittite world (Canby 2002), but other examples are known from Cypriot seals (Gubel and Smith 2010). He receives an animal possibly killed in a hunt.

Seal owners in this house at Kition drew on iconographies of power from within their own household, from the wider settlement of Kition, and from outside of Cyprus. Patterns found among the seals of this household also link with habits of seal recarving found at other Late Bronze Age Cypriot settlements, especially in the years following ca. 1200 BCE.

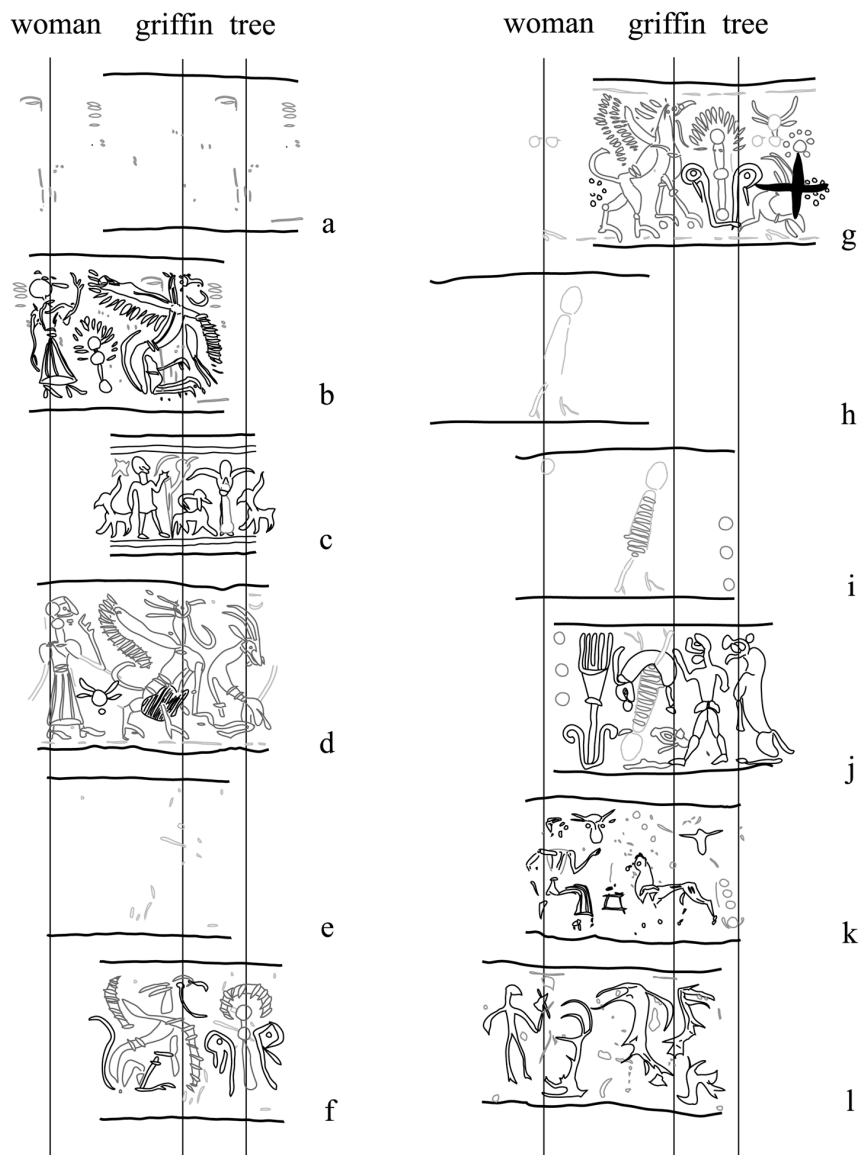


Figure 5: Comparison of the locations of the woman, griffin, and tree in the layers on recarved cylinder seals of soft dark stone from Episkopi-Bamboula. Arranged from top to bottom and left to right by the deposition date of each seal, from LC IIA to LC IIIA, each scene is lined up according to details of a woman, griffin, and/or tree: (a–b) field no. S 104. Height 2.01 cm; (c) field no. Mi 169. Height 1.62 cm; (d) field no. S 81. Height 2.32 cm; (e–f) inv. no. 1896.2-1.14. Height 2.1 cm; (g) field no. S 82. Height 2.26 cm; (h–j) field no. S 6. Height 1.9 cm; (k) field no. Mi 195. Height 2.09 cm; (l) field no. Mi 194. Height 2.1 cm. (a–b, k–l in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia; c–d, g–j in the Local Kourion Museum, Episkopi, Cyprus; and e–f in The British Museum, London, Department of Greece and Rome). Drawings by J. S. Smith.

Settlement

Another example of how seals were refashioned within household complexes comes from the site of Kourion at the Late Bronze Age settlement of Episkopi-Bamboula that lies at the southern end of the Kouris River. Excavations by the British Museum, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Cincinnati have uncovered tombs, houses, possible workshops, a well, and parts of a wall around the settlement.¹⁷ The two largest areas of excavation are Area A to the northeast near a gate leading southeast toward the river and Area E to the northwest. The users of seals from these two different parts of the settlement adapted cylinder seals of the same design in two different ways (Smith 2012d: 65–74).

Both areas preserve parts of several houses (Weinberg 1983). In Area A the largest cluster of rooms may be one large structure or three separate buildings with party walls. In Area E the houses are less well preserved, but they do not share walls and are mainly two-room structures except for one larger, more finely constructed building to the west. Tombs are associated with houses in Area E but not in Area A. These two areas are taken here as clusters of households because of the uncertainty associated with the precise definition of each individual building.

From Episkopi-Bamboula there are eleven cylinder seals, eleven stamp seals, one impression made by a small stone cylinder seal, and seven impressions made by five other wooden rollers.¹⁸ Of the cylinder seals, eight display clear signs of recarving and still preserve figural designs (Fig. 5). Their find contexts range in date from Late Cypriot IIA (ca. 1450–1375 BCE) to Late Cypriot IIIA (ca. 1200–1125 BCE). All eight began as seals with a similar design featuring a striding robed woman, a griffin, and a tree. Figure 5 shows all eight of these recarved cylinder seals at the same scale (Smith 2012d: fig. 20). They are arranged in chronological order by find context. For those with more than one stage of carving that featured the woman, griffin, and tree, each stage of carving is separated out. Each is oriented with respect to three vertical lines that show the locations of the woman, griffin, and tree; their similarity not just of design, but scale and positioning is immediately apparent.

In deposits definitively or probably predating the Late Cypriot IIIA period, recarved cylinder seals adhered closely to the original woman, griffin, and tree design (Fig. 5a–f). These seals were found in tombs of the LCIIA period (Penn Museum 49–12–152; S104) (Fig. 5a–b),¹⁹ LC IIA-C period (Episkopi Museum Mi 169) (Fig. 5c),²⁰ and

17 Benson 1972; Weinberg 1983; Kiely 2009; Smith 2012d: 42–43; Walberg, forthcoming.

18 Benson 1956; Porada 1972; Smith 2012d: 60, 93–99.

19 University of Pennsylvania Tomb 12; Porada 1972: 144, cat. no. B 1623, pl. 38; Smith 2012d: 66, 94, Appendix 2, cat. no. 2.

20 University of Pennsylvania Tomb 36; Porada 1972: 144, cat. no. B 1628, pl. 38; Smith 2012d: 68, 94, Appendix 2, cat. no. 5.

LC II–III period (British Museum 1896.2–1.14) (Fig. 5e–f)²¹ and in Area C in an LC IIC or early LCIII deposit (Episkopi Museum S 81) (Fig. 5d).²² The earliest and latest examples of these were recarved by refreshing the scene without adding new figures. On the one from Tomb 12, the remains of the griffin's wings (Fig. 5a) are visible behind the head of the woman (Fig. 5b). On the one from Tomb 43 the griffin was also shifted and its earlier form (Fig. 5e) is visible below the later griffin and tree (Fig. 5f). That from Area C replaced the tree with a goat, but maintained the key figures of the woman and griffin (Fig. 5d). The furthest iconographic departure was on the seal from Tomb 36 where the griffin was transformed into a staff held by a man approaching the tree, now flanked by goats (Fig. 5c). However, like the other three, the design built on and reused elements from the earlier scene.

Among seals found in deposits clearly of the Late Cypriot IIIA period (Fig. 5g–l) beginning around 1200 B.C.E., however, there is a stark difference between Area A (Fig. 5g–j), where recarvings modified but reused elements of the original scene, and Area E (Fig. 5k–l) where the earlier scene was abraded and replaced with an entirely different cast of characters. The subjects of the seals change from the scene of procession, featuring a woman, griffin, and tree, to male figures, bulls, and hunting. This shift is also found in the subject matter of other cylinder and stamp seals that were newly carved, used, and deposited in Late Cypriot IIIA.

On one example found in the street of Area A (Episkopi Museum S 82), the woman was replaced by a goat and a bucranium, but the griffin and tree remain (Fig. 5g).²³ The remains of the original scene are harder to see on the second example (Episkopi Museum S 6) (Fig. 5h–j),²⁴ from House VII, but the woman (Fig. 5h) was first transformed into the griffin facing the tree (Fig. 5i) and that griffin and a modified tree remain in the final scene, where a goat appears impaled on the remains of the griffin (Fig. 5j). In House VII there is also a newly carved cylinder seal that features an Egyptianizing scene of the hunt, but the stamp seals from the same house deposit all reference griffins.

These contrast with the two cylinder seals found in University of Pennsylvania Tomb 19 (Fig. 5k–l) in Area E that were recarved with completely new designs. Each was abraded, but the remains of the original woman, griffin, and tree can be picked out from the pattern of drill holes and shallow engravings remaining below the final intaglio carvings. On one example (Penn Museum 49–12–298), a man holding a dagger or spear stands before or among animals (Fig. 5k).²⁵ On the other (Penn Museum 49–12–294) a male figure is seated (Fig. 5l).²⁶ A table separates him from a

21 British Museum Tomb 43; Smith 2012d: 66–67, 95, Appendix 2, cat. no. 8.

22 Porada 1972: 144, cat. no. B 1624, pl. 38; Smith 2012d: 67, 95, Appendix 2, cat. no. 7.

23 Porada 1972: 144, cat. no. B 1625, pl. 38; Smith 2012d: 69–70, 96, Appendix 2, cat. no. 14.

24 Porada 1972: 144, cat. no. B 1627, pl. 38; Smith 2012d: 70, 96, Appendix 2, cat. no. 13.

25 Porada 1972: 144, cat. no. B 1626, pl. 38; Smith 2012d: 71–72, 96, Appendix 2, cat. no. 15.

26 Porada 1972: 144, cat. no. B 1629, pl. 38; Smith 2012d: 71–72, 96, Appendix 2, cat. no. 16.

standing bull. Two bucrania are in the upper field. As at Kition, at Episkopi the seal carver introduced the scene of the seated male. Unlike Kition, however, this was done without building on the elements of the seal's earlier design. An older seal was still used, but any power inherent in the earlier figures was rubbed out.

Stamp seals from Tomb 19 feature a hunter, a figure that could be either a bull or a griffin, and a griffin (Smith 2012d: 72). All other stamp seals from LCIIIA deposits at the site feature bulls (Smith 2012d: 72–73). The iconographic shift in Area E was not absolute, just as the carving choices in Area A did not only retain figures of a woman, griffin, and tree. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable contrast between Areas A and E in how carvers chose or were directed to refashion older cylinder seals. Processions were replaced by confrontations between man and animal.

Region

Larger regional patterns emerge when the patterns found within households and settlements are considered in connection with neighboring sites that are connected via river routes, adjacent coastlines, and other natural geographical routes of communication. In the Kouris River Valley, for example, a larger regional pattern emerges when the thematic changes at Episkopi-Bamboula are considered in relationship to large seal impressions made with wooden rollers from the neighboring settlement of Alassa. Alassa is located to the north in the foothills of the Troodos Mountains (Hadjisavvas 1996).

Excavations by the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus have revealed houses, workshops, tombs, and a possible cult area at Alassa-Pano Mandilaris. The tombs range in date from the LC IB to the LC IIIA period, while the settlement remains are largely of the LC IIIA period. They also uncovered at least three monumental buildings that served administrative and cult functions at Alassa-Palaeotaverna. Deposits below the floors of Building II at Alassa-Palaeotaverna show that this complex of monumental structures was built starting in LC IIC. They remained in use through LCIIIA (Hadjisavvas 2003).

Over 150 impressions made by six different wooden rollers have been found at Alassa-Palaeotaverna, but it is not yet clear whether any were found in deposits that date before LC IIIA.²⁷ The two cylinder seals and one stamp seal from the excavations have not yet been published and it is unknown whether any bear traces of recarving (Smith 2012d: 63, n. 157). One wooden roller with a row of griffins was used at both Alassa and Episkopi-Bamboula (Smith 2007: 357). The other figural roller designs from Alassa are different, but parallel the thematic changes found at Episkopi. In addition to a geometric pattern, the rollers depict a man driving a chariot in a scene of

27 Hadjisavvas 2001; Hadjisavvas 2002; Smith 2007; Keswani 2009.

the hunt and combats between men and bulls, lions, and griffins. Unlike Episkopi, the griffin at Alassa is shown slain by a male combatant (Smith 2012d: 75–77).

At Episkopi-Bamboula, fragments of large ceramic vessels impressed by wooden rollers were found in Areas D, E, and F along the northwest edge of the settlement (Smith 2012d: 75). None come from Area A. People at Episkopi had a long history of seal ownership. They repeatedly built on images from their own past and only began to change when those who constructed the large complex at Alassa began to play a significant role in the regional economy and politics. People at Alassa emphasized new themes and compositions that did not build on the forms of the past. They drew on ideas unrelated to the longevity inherent in a small cylinder seal of stone. Even though some at Episkopi continued to draw on that authority, the introduction there of the large wooden roller and the stamp seal underscores that artistic ideas about seal designs were changing ca. 1200 BCE, both in terms of iconography and in terms of form.

Among regions

The Kouris River Valley preserves the only direct evidence for the use of the same sealing tool – a wooden roller – at two different settlements. Nevertheless, connections in and among other regions can also be observed by studying seals of similar subject matter, especially when changes in designs can be observed due to the recarving of cylinder seals. Stratigraphies of figural recarving begin to suggest what the geographical reach of power might have been for someone whose seal bore a particular design.

Seal designs that are strongly associated with Kition – the double register – and Episkopi – the woman, griffin, and tree – are found at other settlements on Cyprus. Variants of the woman, griffin, and tree composition are more numerous and widespread (Webb 1989) than are seals with designs featuring pairs of nearly mirror-image figures arranged in a double register (Webb 1987: 47). Both are found at Enkomi-Ayios Iakovos near the east coast. This site is the most extensively excavated Late Bronze Age settlement on the island. It has been the target of controlled excavations by the British Museum (Crewe 2009; Pilides 2012), the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (Sjöqvist 1934), the French Mission (Courtois et al. 1986), and the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus.²⁸ Over 300 seals of all shapes and materials have been uncovered at Enkomi.²⁹ According to Jennifer Webb, over 200 cylinder seals have been found there (Webb 1987: 25, n. 1). More than 100 come from controlled excavations (Smith 2013: 15). Less than half of these cylinder seals were found in or near tombs by the British Museum and the Swedish Cyprus Expedition (Smith 2013: 14).

²⁸ Dikaios 1969a; Dikaios 1969b; Dikaios 1969c; Dikaios 1971.

²⁹ For a detailed listing of seals from Enkomi see the Appendix in Smith 2013; on the number from tombs see Smith 2013: 13.

Most useful for looking at long-term changes among seals at Enkomi is Area III excavated by Porphyrios Dikaïos. This area along the north edge of the settlement contains several houses and workshops with party walls. There seals were found in settlement contexts from LC IIA2-IIB through the end of the Late Cypriot period (Porada 1971). Other settlement areas, such as his Area I and the several Quartiers excavated by Claude Schaeffer, revealed strata that contained seals almost exclusively from LC III contexts (Smith 2013: 16–22).

The tombs excavated by the Swedish Cyprus Expedition revealed seals from well-defined burial contexts ranging from LC IB-IIA to LC IIIB (Sjöqvist 1934; Smith 2013: 17, 20). The tombs excavated by the British Museum are less useful because of the breadth of possible dates for the deposits (Crewe 2009: guide to the collection). Unlike the majority of settlement contexts, none of the British Museum tombs containing seals are exclusively LC III in date. Several seals were found outside tombs in unstratified contexts.

Other than Kition, Enkomi is the only settlement on Cyprus with more than one seal carved with a double-register of figures. The double register design had a long history with roots in the Near East (Webb 1987: 47, n. 99). From Hala Sultan Tekke, a settlement adjacent to Kition on the south coast, there is a seal in two registers that lacks the central dividing line (British Museum 1898.12–1.183).³⁰ It was found in Tomb IV of the Late Cypriot IIB period by the British Museum (Bailey 1976: 11–14). As with most double-register seals at Kition, the figures are all oriented so that there is only one possible top to the design. The only other double register seal from a well-documented context was found at Maroni-Tsaroukkas in 1993 (Larnaca Museum ZW/14) (Collon 1994). It, however, is arranged antithetically such that the register at the bottom is always upside-down. Only half of its diameter survives and the carving of its figures is linear rather than drilled and roundly modeled as at Kition and Hala Sultan Tekke.

The double-register seals with documented find contexts at Enkomi were found in the French excavations (Cyprus Museum 13.110) in an LC IIIA context³¹ and by the British Museum in Tomb 32 (British Museum 1897.4–1.41) that dates to LCIB–LCIII.³² Both bear drilled and roundly modeled figures similar to those on the seals from Kition. The cylinder found in Enkomi Tomb 32 is closely comparable with the example discussed from Tomb 9 at Kition except that its two registers are antithetical; as at Maroni, whichever way the seal is oriented, the register at the bottom is always upside-down. The context of the seal offers no firm depositional date, but the seal does not appear to have been recarved.

The registers of design on the cylinder from Schaeffer's excavations are also arranged antithetically, but the design lacks the symmetry of both the example from

30 Kenna 1971: 28, pl. XVII, no. 71; Kenna 1976: 33, pl. VIII.c-d.

31 Courtois and Webb 1987: 8; Webb 1987: 47–52, pl. 3, no. 8.

32 Kenna 1971: 27, pl. XVI, no. 66; Crewe 2009.

Kition Tomb 9 and the seal from Tomb 32. Webb (1987: 47) has suggested that it was recarved. Study of the design does not reveal traces of one figure cutting into another. If recarved, some seated figures from the original symmetrical design were retained and scenes of chariots and the hunt were added. Such a recarving of this double register seal at Enkomi adds to the pattern of seals to which scenes of the hunt were added in the LCIIIA period.

Seals related to the theme of women, griffins, and trees were also found at Enkomi. Seals with these elements come from sites all over Cyprus (Webb 1989). A few have also been found in the Levant (Smith 2006). At Enkomi, three come from Dikaio's Area III (Fig. 6).³³ The earliest of these three seals (Cyprus Museum 1694) was found in Room 56 almost on floor V early in Level IIB, which corresponds to the LC IIC period (ca. 1340/1315–1200 BCE)³⁴ (Fig. 6a). It depicts a woman and a griffin; while its linear carving style is different from the seals at Episkopi-Bamboula, its theme is the same as most of the seals from there. From Room 3c on floor IV, somewhat later in Level IIB, is a cylinder (Cyprus Museum 1714) that preserves at least three layers of carving (Fig. 6b–d). While its surface is worn, it preserves enough to show that its two earlier original designs featured a griffin and a figure, probably a woman, as well as a tree (Figs. 6b–c). The final design includes a bucranium but otherwise retains all the original figures (Fig. 6d). The last in the sequence (Cyprus Museum 1230) is from a layer overlying floor IV in Room 13 and is late in Level IIB, ca. 1200 BCE. While its original design is harder to reconstruct due to the wear of the seal, it included a griffin and a tree (Fig. 6e). The final carving portrays a bull goring the griffin with its horn through the neck (Fig. 6f). These seals, all found in Area III along the edge of the settlement, were found in close proximity but in different clusters of rooms that are arguably related to different household groups.³⁵

This pattern of seal recarving through time found in Area III at Enkomi strongly recalls the patterns found at Episkopi-Bamboula. Bucrania are the earliest figural elements related to the new themes of men, combat, and bulls that were added to these preexisting scenes. More complex recarvings followed ca. 1200 BCE into LC IIIA. Some representations from that period alter the stance of griffins as protectors, sometimes through recarving, and thrust them into scenes of combat.

Among the seals found by Schaeffer is an example from an LC IIIA context in Quartier 3W (Cyprus Museum 13.193)³⁶ that is comparable to that in Figures 6e–f. It once bore a design with a tree, now transformed into a rough sun disk rather than a bird. More thoroughly abraded than many other examples, the bull in combat with two

³³ Dikaio's 1969b: pls. 179, 181–82, 182A; Porada 1971: 791, 794–95, nos. 4a (1714), 4b (1694), and 9 (1230).

³⁴ Kling 1989; Manning et al. 2001.

³⁵ Dikaio's 1969c: pl. 251, Rooms 3c, 13, and 56.

³⁶ Courtois and Webb 1987: 8; Webb 1987: 52–54, pl. 4, no. 9.

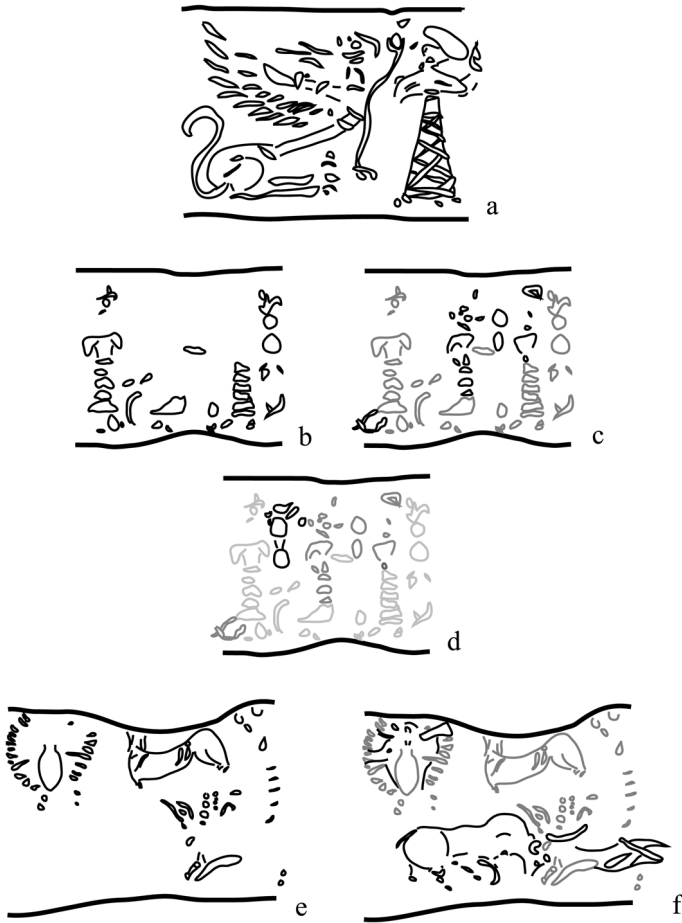


Figure 6: Drawings of the layers of carving on three soft dark stone cylinder seals from Enkomi Area III, Level IIB, excavated by Porphyrion Dikaios: (a) inv. no. 1714, room 3c. Height 1.82 cm; (b–d) inv. no. 1694, room 56. Height 2.3 cm.; (e–f) inv. no. 1230, room 13. Height 2.15 cm. All in the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia. Drawings by J. S. Smith.

lions covers traces of earlier figures. The unusual body of the bull, its hind parts lower than its shoulders recalls the usual seated position of a griffin, which suggests that the bull was shaped out of the body of the griffin that once sat next to the tree. Another seal with a griffin and a tree was found by Schaeffer in 1953, but no museum location or stratigraphic information has been published except that it was found in Quartier 3W (inv. no. 8.04).³⁷

³⁷ Courtois et al. 1986: 179, pl. XXXI.21.



Figure 7: Greenish-gray soft stone cylinder seal and its modern impression from Enkomi, Cyprus. Recarved at least once to include the seated figure. Swedish Cyprus Expedition Tomb 7A, no. 6. Height 2.34 cm. Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm. Photographs by J. S. Smith.

At Enkomi, there are seals of many designs, and study of the full stratigraphy of seal carving continues. As at Kition and Episkopi, the seated male figure was a subject prominent in recarving. Several imported seals at Enkomi depict seated male figures, as in British Museum Tombs 93 (British Museum 1897.4–1.606) and 75 (British Museum 1897.4–1.425)³⁸ and Swedish Cyprus Expedition Tomb 2 (Medelhavsmuseet Tomb 2/67).³⁹ Seated females, most likely goddesses (Webb 1987: 50–51) as on the double register seals, are also found. However, it was not until sometime late in LC IIC that carvers began to add a seated male figure over a previously carved scene.

In Area III on the LC IIC floor is a thoroughly abraded cylinder with a headless person standing before a seated figure (Cyprus Museum 1536).⁴⁰ Also in LC IIIB Tomb 7A found by the Swedish (Medelhavsmuseet Tomb 7A/6),⁴¹ another cylinder was recarved with a schematic seated figure behind whom is a standing robed figure (Fig. 7). The original design featured the robed figure, possibly a woman, and what seems to be a tree, now covered with circular drill marks.

³⁸ Kenna 1971: 24–25, pls. XI, XIII, nos. 45 and 54.

³⁹ Sjöqvist 1934: 474, pls. LXXVI.2, CL.11, Tomb 2, no. 67; Collon 2003: 280–81, no. 320.

⁴⁰ Dikaios 1969b: pls. 179, 181; Porada 1971: 799, no. 16 (1536).

⁴¹ Sjöqvist 1934: 499–500, pls. LXXXI.8, CL.12, Tomb 7A, no. 6; Collon 2003: 282–83, no. 322.

Island

Around 1200 BCE, wooden roller designs featuring men and bulls in combat are found at settlements across the island (Smith 2007). Stratigraphies of seal carving at Kition, Kourion, and Enkomi also demonstrate that during the same period there were meaningful changes in the design and subject matter of stone cylinder seals. Patterns detected in single households and settlements as well as within and among regions feature themes similar to those depicted on the wooden rollers. These themes were current even at inland sites far from urban centers. Not only were there wooden roller impressed pithoi (Webb and Frankel 1994), but also seal owners had designs on their cylinder seals altered in ways that were similar to recarvings found in coastal areas.

Examples come from the site of Akaki-Trounalli located north of the Troodos Mountains; the closest large Late Bronze Age settlement is Morphou-Toumba tou Skourou. At Akaki, two cylinder seals were found in 1969 by the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus in a looted tomb of the Late Bronze Age (Fig. 8). Among its remaining contents was Base Ring II pottery. The two seals were described briefly by Edith Porada for Vassos Karageorghis and assigned to the fourteenth century BCE, although she also noted that they had been used over a long period of time.⁴² Interestingly she noted that a seal from Episkopi-Bamboula featuring a woman, griffin, and tree was a close parallel for the seals from Akaki.

Both seals originally featured women, one facing a griffin and the other facing a tree. Both seals were recarved. In the case of the seal featuring the woman and tree, a bucranium was added (Fig. 8a). The other seal had its scene of a woman facing a griffin (Fig. 8b) transformed into one where the woman witnesses a combat between a lion and a griffin (Fig. 8c). A single Cypro-Minoan sign was also added to the scene. The looted find context of these seals from Akaki makes close dating of their recarvings difficult, but the thematic changes in seal designs featuring the woman, griffin, and tree are striking.

Conclusions

Relatively few seals have been found in early Late Bronze Age contexts, and many found in LC IIIA contexts have been so thoroughly reworked as to make full readings of earlier designs difficult. Nevertheless, seal stratigraphies yield hitherto unrecognized sequences of the art of seal carving through time and across the island. By considering seal designs as products of more than one period of manufacture, diachronic study highlights points of connection as well as divergence among households, settlements, and regions.

⁴² Karageorghis 1970: 204–205, 207, fig. 18.

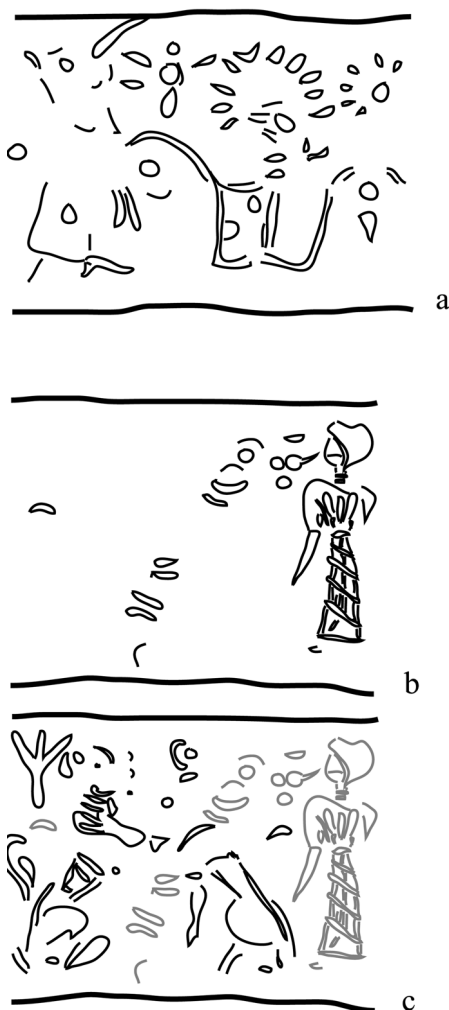


Figure 8: Drawings of two soft black stone cylinder seals from Akaki-Trounalli, Cyprus: (a) all carvings visible on inv. no. CS1754/11. Height 1.99 cm; (b–c) earlier and later carvings on inv. no. CS1754/12. Height 1.92 cm. Both in the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia. Drawings by J. S. Smith.

In particular, the seal stratigraphies outlined here reveal that there were some commonly held ideas especially around 1200 BCE. Meaningful changes in the compositions and subjects of these powerful tools of control came at a time when power structures on the island were adapting to political upheaval in the Mediterranean, Egypt, and Near East. Hierarchy and combat became more commonplace among seals carved on rather than just imported to Cyprus. While rare scenes of male figures wielding weapons were painted on pottery vessels early in the Late Cypriot period,⁴³

⁴³ Karageorghis 1979: 198–203; Karageorghis 2006: 56–59.

the deliberate revision of older seals to feature seated male figures and scenes of conflict may reflect changing leadership and an increased hierarchy of political power than had existed previously.

In this period of transition from LC IIC to LC IIIA, ca. 1200 BCE, funerary display ceased to be the primary venue for social competition (Keswani 2004: 143–44) and non-funerary cult buildings increased in number and size (Webb 1999: 288). The inconsistencies among the designs of the seals featuring the new themes of men and combat may also be evidence of more complex socio-political competition (Smith 2012d: 76–77). This period also marks a rise in the quantity of figural arts on the island. The new themes of fighting, the chase, the hunt, bulls, and men find strong thematic and formal parallels in several other artistic media, from ivory carving and bronze casting to vase painting, faience, and even textiles (Smith 2007). At the time that these themes resonated widely on Cyprus, artists began to work in multiple media, crafting assemblages of objects with related imagery rather than just single objects. Earlier in the Late Bronze Age, complex figural scenes were common only on cylinder seals. The drilled figures and the subject matter of the double-register design characteristic of Kition and the scene of the woman, griffin, and tree typical of Kourion are repeated on cylinder seals at more than one settlement on Cyprus. However, no other media bear similar designs.

Even though these design changes can be, in part, connected with political upheaval outside the island, patterns that connect the designs of cylinder seals, including recarved examples, found on Cyprus and seals attributed to Cyprus found outside the island are much harder to trace. Good examples of this discrepancy are the cylinder seals thought to be Cypriot that were found at Thebes in Boeotia, Greece. In her study of this material, Edith Porada was only able to identify one parallel from Cyprus for these eleven Cypriot seals (Musée du Louvre AM 1639).⁴⁴ She wrote that “one would assume that it will be possible eventually to locate each of the styles [found at Thebes] at a specific Cypriote site” (Porada 1981: 29).

Part of the problem with finding these connections is that so many Cypriot carved seals found outside of Cyprus are from contexts earlier than the majority of deposits in which seals have been found on the island. Those at Thebes are estimated to have been outside of Cyprus by the mid-thirteenth century BCE at the latest. Yet many of the seals preserved on Cyprus are from post-thirteenth century BCE contexts. Several examples at Thebes retain definable traces of their Near Eastern origins as well as the Cypriot recarvings. By comparison, relatively few recarved seals on Cyprus can still be identified with a specific Near Eastern stylistic origin. Completion of a stratigraphy of seal carving for examples of Cypriot seals outside the island will surely help to test whether there are more links of the kind Porada suggested.

⁴⁴ The seal was found in a tomb at Sinda (Dussaud 1914: 265, 429–30, figs. 188.13, 319).

Recognition that objects were products of many time periods reveals artistic habits and ideas that change over time and in different places in response to economic, social, political, environmental, and other conditions. The examples touched on in this paper date mainly to the Late Bronze Age, but the examples cited from Kition reach into the Iron Age, including how cylinder seals were adapted for those who were increasingly in the habit of using stamp seals (Smith 2003a). Cylinder seals, which embody ideas about long-term authority, are especially revealing when considered as products of more than one period of manufacture. Other art forms also can reveal layers of images, whether through the addition or subtraction of the medium of manufacture. Cypriots were masters of transformation. Histories developed through the close observation of their arts reveal new avenues for the study of ancient Cyprus and its connections with its neighbors.

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Abbreviation

SA = State Archives, Nicosia, Cyprus

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III. Text and Image

Cory D. Crawford

Relating Image and Word in Ancient Mesopotamia

Abstract: This chapter investigates theoretical and practical relationships between ancient Mesopotamian images and texts. It starts with observations drawn from studies outside and inside the field, finding most prominently a problematic tendency to view images through linguistically motivated frameworks that are in part the legacy of biblical and Protestant notions of verbal and textual supremacy. Efforts to obviate the reduction of images to texts, however, are seen in some recent alternative approaches to the co-presence of image and text in ancient Mesopotamian material culture. Finally, it is suggested that ancient Mesopotamians related images and texts in dynamic ways that challenge modern assumptions about their separability and categorization, as exemplified in the Late Bronze Age statue of Idrimi from Alalakh and the Iron Age Esarhaddon treaty tablet at Tell Tayinat.

Keywords: text and image, iconoclasm, agency, Idrimi, Tell Tayinat

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Introduction

Many of the best-known examples of ancient Near Eastern artworks are pictorial as well as textual. The continued philosophical inquiry into the relationship between these two dimensions of production – significant in its range as well as new depth – justifies the continued exploration of the image-text nexus in theoretical as well as practical frameworks. The historical compartmentalization of the study of the ancient Near East into philology, art history, and archaeology has resulted in the frequent parsing of analytical work into separate studies with cropped foci.¹ Rather, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, students of such objects are “constrained to take on the subject of the image/text [problem], not as a kind of luxury ‘option’ for the amateur, the generalist, or the aesthete, but as a literal, material necessity dictated by the concrete forms of actual representational practices” (1994: 89). As we shall see, the behavior of texts and images in the ancient Near East is neither straightforward nor circumscribed by modern experience; texts need not function to encode propositions

¹ For more on the compartmentalization of the field, see, among others, Winter 1997; Bahrani 2003. As Michael Squire (2009) points out, something similar has been the case in Classics.

about the world any more than images to represent things in it. Furthermore, the very division into categories of image and/or/versus text runs the risk of reifying ontological boundaries not necessarily operative or impermeable in ancient Mesopotamia. Rather, texts could act as pictures and images could tell stories, and thereby they often explore, collapse, and challenge the permeable line between “the” two, if we were to admit one.

Adding to the problem of the sometimes-rigid separation of works into “visual” and “verbal” is the fact that scholars have traditionally favored the latter. Texts have historically taken center stage in the discipline while images have had to fight from the wings for attention as primary and not derivative sources of information and sites of analysis (cf. Winter 1997; Uehlinger 2007). As the present volume attests, however, the field is changing, and it is one of the purposes of this paper to highlight some of the important studies that take advantage of the confluence of image and text in the analysis of ancient Near Eastern material culture as a way of highlighting profitable directions for the future. After an investigation of major shifts in the study of depiction and writing intended to illuminate some of the commitments and hazards of modern viewpoints, I will turn to recent studies that exemplify approaches to and central issues concerning ancient Near Eastern “imagetexts.”²

Hierarchies in Philosophical Treatments of Image-Word Relations

The ancient Near East itself, at least through the Persian period, produced no extended philosophical or exegetical treatise on the relationship between the arts or on aesthetics as far as the extant records admit (cf. Winter 1995). The closest one comes is perhaps in biblical discourses on idolatry, which attempt alternatively to collapse the divine statue into the (non) god depicted, identifying the god with the mundane aspects of its production, or to imply the opposite, namely that the other god-statues were capable of response (1 Samuel 5; Isaiah 19). At the same time, of course, the verbal communion came to be vaunted as the privileged mode of communication with Yahweh (cf. 1 Kings 19). The divinely *written* ten commandments (lit. *āšeret haddābār-îm*: “the ten words”) proscribe the making and worship of a carved image (*pesel*) or likeness (*tāmûnâ*) of gods and apparently any mimetic depiction.³ The extreme end of the polarity is expressed in the so-called “Name Theology” of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, in which the tangible interaction between Yahweh and Israel

2 Following Mitchell (1994: 89, n. 9), I will use the term “imagetext” to indicate concrete examples of compositions that bring together textual and visual dimensions.

3 Exodus 20:4–6; cf. Deuteronomy 5:8–10, which seems to extend the prohibition to any kind of image making. On this see Schmidt 1995: 82.

is mediated by his name and voice, not his presence or sight (cf. Richter 2002; Sommer 2009).⁴ This difference is not described simply as a matter of convention or of proscription based on cultural identity markers, but as one of ontological symmetry with the divine: “Yhwh spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but perceived no shape – nothing but a voice” (Deuteronomy 4: 12). Beyond these famous injunctions, the classic biblical statements on images are the “icon parodies” of second Isaiah and Jeremiah (e.g., Isaiah 44: 9–20; Jeremiah 10: 1–16). Nathaniel Levtow (2008) locates these parodies specifically within the practices of Mesopotamian image production but also more generally in the way sociopolitical struggles for power were manifest in the targeting of enemy deities.

In the apparent reaction of these traditions to Mesopotamian practices we see both the association between images and ontological realities they reflect as well as the effort to make a strong division between visual and verbal expression. In this sense they also constitute the first historical documentation of the way the word-image dichotomy comes to map onto cultural struggles. The argument advanced, namely that the reason not to produce divine images is because Yahweh himself did not engage the Israelites visually, is not a purely philosophical claim; it is embedded in a broader struggle against the imperial presence of Assyria and Babylon. Such mappings onto cultural divisions are familiar territory in the nexus of words and images. As many have noted, the values implied in the image-text relationship are frequently reproduced in fundamental socio-political relations, including gender, race, and, as in the present case, religion.⁵ The biblical discourse is particularly important in this light for its role in the modern effort to recover the Assyro-Babylonian past. In many ways, this role primed the emerging field to find and resurrect the idolatrous Other in the material record and concomitantly allowed these iconoclastic discursive practices of the Iron Age to reverberate in the modern era. They are thus crucial to unpack in order to better approximate ancient Near Eastern understandings of the relationship.⁶

4 There are very important visual components of the Israelite religion, but almost all texts of the Hebrew Bible are anxious in the extreme about the (un)mediated sight of Yahweh, either depicted or “live.” So while cherubim and other (even figural) cultic objects are described, one finds no clear indication of statues of Yahweh himself.

5 See, among others, Mitchell (1994: 151–81, especially 162–65), for a discussion of the word-image implication in discourses of race and gender; see Bahrani (2003) for the implications of the colonial roots of ancient Near Eastern art history and its role in discourses of alterity, and Schwartz (2006) on the assertion that words and images require higher and lower forms of cognition. The problem of image-text relations inscribed in Western religious contexts is of course not limited to the biblical contest between Israel and Mesopotamia. Squire (2009: 94) succinctly relates another example, to cite only one, in his summary of G.E. Lessing’s position in his *Laocöon*: Lessing “decried the infiltration of a (French Catholic) penchant for the picturesque into the (German Protestant) realm of pure and proper poetry.”

6 Cf. the detailed discussion in the first three chapters of Bahrani 2003.

One of the chief mechanisms of the transmission of biblical logocentric values, and, indeed, a turning point in image-text relations in the West, was the Protestant Reformation. Luther himself did not articulate an absolute iconoclasm: he worked from the analogy that just as Christ's material existence was a necessary medium between God and man, so could images mediate between man and faith in Christ's material absence; they become "a vehicle for contemplating the divine" (Squire 2009: 27). As such, Luther established a clear hierarchy between words and images such that the image was subjected to the word. He saw a positive value in depiction through its potential to provoke the mind to higher thought, and thus it was in some sense an evil necessitated by the ignorance of the masses and the imperfections of the flesh. Depiction was of value insofar as it pointed the way toward something greater than itself, namely, the *Word*.⁷

This two-part move – the affirmation of a word-image dichotomy and the ranking of the former above the latter – would provide a model that proved difficult to escape, even for works without explicit theological commitments. Squire has charted how Luther's legacy of linguistic imperialism was carried forward by major figures of art history and aesthetics, especially Winckelmann, Kant, and Hegel, even while they would channel earlier ideas of material dualism deriving ultimately from classical thought. These thinkers in one way or another, argues Squire, propagated the Protestant mode by emptying images of significance and locating their power instead in individual minds (2009: 15–89). Of particular note is Kant's subjugation of the image to the sublime that also marks his inheritance of the biblical tradition: "Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth" (Kant 1987: 135§29).

This Protestant move would also disrupt what was one of the richest conversations about the nature of the relationship of verbal and pictorial arts, which produced the first explicit theoretical concern for the relationship between image and word. Greek philosophical efforts to conceptualize the relationship between the so-called sister arts understood painting and poetry, among other arts such as music, to possess related capacities for representing and expressing mimetically.⁸ Plutarch famously quoted the late-sixth-century BCE poet Simonides as saying that painting is silent poetry and poetry vocal painting (*Glor. Ath.* 346 F; cf. *Poet. Aud.* 17 F). Such concepts are evinced in practice through, for example, the verbal technique of *ekphrasis*, "a

7 On Luther's language hierarchy, see Koerner 1993; on the aftermath of Luther's stance toward images, see Squire 2009: 15–89.

8 Stephen Halliwell (2009: 12) reminds us that the usual translation of *mimesis* as "imitation" "does scant justice to the ways in which Greeks used interpretations of *mimesis* to wrestle with problems, in modern terms, both of representation and of expression. The status of *mimesis* intersects, moreover, with issues of truth and falsehood/fiction, especially in poetry, and different versions of *mimesis* cover a spectrum stretching from 'world-reflecting' realism to 'world-creating' idealism."

type of speech that worked an immediate impact on the mind of the listener, sparking mental images of the subjects it ‘placed before the eyes’” (Webb 2009: 193).⁹ Plato and Aristotle characterized visual and verbal arts as possessing the ability to represent the same things by different means, although Platonic thought saw tangible images as secondary to conceptual forms.¹⁰ The concern for the relative capacities of the arts would coalesce in the *ut pictura poesis* tradition (“as with painting, so with poetry,”) immortalized by Horace in the first century BCE, which thrived in Europe from the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries before it was challenged beginning in the eighteenth century, most directly and famously by Gotthold Lessing. Lessing’s investigation led him to the conclusion that the different capacities of painting and poetry were fundamentally circumscribed by another dichotomy, that of space and time. Painting presents its content synchronically but in space, and poetry only exists diachronically and is unbounded by spatial parameters. These differences were not neutral in value; they were bound by the same Lutheran hierarchies mentioned above. Poetry was, for Lessing, pure content while painting the mere form thereof.¹¹ His ideal, like that of Kant, was that the image became invisible as it entered the imagination, that it thereby attained the limitless potential of thought: “In poetry a robe is no robe. It conceals nothing. Our imagination sees through it in every part;” further, “what pleases us in a work of art pleases not the eye, but the imagination through the eye” (Lessing 1874: 40, 43 respectively). Thus Lessing too tilts the tables toward the verbal arts, owing to their greater proximity to the boundless imagination.

Perhaps it is not insignificant that Lessing’s orientation engaged with a pre-Peircean semiotics: “the same picture, whether presented to the imagination by arbitrary [that is, linguistic] or natural [that is, pictorial] signs, must always give us a similar pleasure, though not always in the same degree” (Lessing 1874: 43).¹² This facet of his thinking brings us to another crucial development in the study of image-text relations, one that gained momentum after the seminal work of Ferdinand de

⁹ Webb’s work shows that *ekphrasis* is much more than the verbal description of works of art; it was rather a *technique* that could be applied to anything seen, such as battle scenes or storms. See, however, Goldhill’s contention (2009) that the existence of descriptions of works of art that circulate as discrete texts, together with the interplay between authors using the technique, justifies its being called at least a tradition, if not a genre.

¹⁰ *Republic* 10; *Poetics* 25. For summary treatments of Greco-Roman approaches to the problem, see Halliwell 2009 and Besançon 2000: 13–62.

¹¹ Lessing’s critique of course continues to provoke response: Irving Babbitt’s *The New Laokoon* (1910), Greenberg’s “Toward a Newer Laocoön” (1940), Krieger’s “Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or Laokoön Revisited” (1967) and Squire’s “Toward an Older Laocoön,” (2009: 90–193) center around the agenda set by Lessing, the former two explicitly concerned to reinforce the boundaries, while Krieger sought to collapse them (or at least to show how the verbal arts can become plastic and spatial). Squire seeks to obviate the Protestant structures completely and to recover the Classical dimensions of the convergence of texts and images.

¹² For a detailed treatment of Lessing’s semiotics, see Wellbery 1984; see also Todorov 1973.

Saussure on systems and structures of linguistic signs. Saussure's elucidation of meaning in language as dependent on systems and dichotomized signs would reshape a welter of disciplines and provide the grist for many a theoretical mill, eventually tilting the word-image relationship in favor of the former, since it was held up as the key not just for languages but for human meaning-making in general, including pictorial imagery. While this is not the place to undertake a survey of the bewildering variety of approaches that carry the banner of semiotics, common threads in the study of signs carried assumptions that would transfer to the study of images as signs. In the study of signs the locus of contact between sender and receiver (speech) is removed from the analytical focus (meaning). That is, in language, phonetic production (the signifier, in Saussurean terms), while crucial, is a vehicle for something more important, the concept indicated by the sound (that is, the signified). As such, crucial to the study of language, at least for Saussure, is the mutual intelligibility of the sender and receiver, the successful transmission of the concept through the medium of language. Speech is inherently representational, therefore, in that at the point of interface the focus of interaction amounts to a series of indices, signs standing in for something not present.¹³

The move to consider visual art as representational is one that requires art to be a system of signs pointing to absence. It is a move that fixes the outcome of the analysis before it has taken place. As we saw with Lessing, while language is comprised of arbitrary signifiers (there is nothing inherently equine in the sound "horse," for example), visual arts in contrast rely on "natural" signifiers, where the signifier was directly related to the essence of the thing signified. A depicted tree must embody recognizable arboreal characteristics for its meaning to be understood. This requires, however, that the depicted tree be, as with linguistic signs, an indicator to a reality beyond itself of necessarily greater interest to the observer, whether audience or analyst. This is thus another way of making the familiar claim that the chief value in depiction is to point to a greater reality beyond itself at the same time forcing it into a linguistic model. Seen as a representation, its presence is null; it disappears as the content lying behind its form emerges in the mind (Wollheim 1977).

In the wake of Saussure and Peirce, the semiotic approach to visual arts intensified in the twentieth century.¹⁴ Studies proliferated, and continue to do so, in which depiction is understood as representational and indicative, as a sign system or systems, as if such were self-evident. This notion is even operative in Erwin Panofsky's influential tripartite process for decoding pictures in *Studies in Iconology* (1939). His well-known opening vignette illustrating the levels of inquiry by describing one

¹³ This is not to say that language is exclusively indicative; important exceptions are, of course, performative speech, such as speech acts, and onomatopoeia.

¹⁴ I do not mean here to collapse the work of Peirce and Saussure, who differed in scope, subject, and of course conclusion about the nature of the sign. I mean only to group them in their attempt to understand signs.

man tipping his hat to another on the street is, tellingly, an act of communication and thus, from the outset, has subsumed the question of image understanding to the process of meaning made between senders and receivers. The sorts of cultural knowledge needed to accomplish a study that accounts for the entire horizon of an image amount in fact to the search for texts to explain images. Panofsky's iconology, which he apparently abandoned at the end of his life (Squire 2009: 79), promised an analytical method attuned to images and delivered instead a sublimation of images to words. Roland Barthes (1977: 15–51), to cite another well-known example, consistently and unapologetically treated images as messages to be decoded, including photography, often understood to be the most mimetic of arts, and tried to get at the “rhetoric” of the image. Apparently unencumbered by the Protestant views described above, Saussurean approaches took the word-image relation in a new direction but arrived at a familiar destination: words hold the key to understanding how images work.¹⁵

The strong reaction seen in the “new art history” against Panofsky's method was enabled by more particularly Peircean semiotics (Harris 2001). The semiotic approach was hailed by Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson (1991: 176) as holding out the potential for a neutral “supradisciplinary” theory, its roots in texts “largely a historical accident.”¹⁶ The unquestioned assumption, however, that art objects are indeed part of a sign system is where the hierarchy is most present, where the reduction is most complete. About their claim, Mitchell (1994: 99, n. 31) similarly responded that “they underestimate ... the extent to which semiotics privileges textual/linguistic descriptive frameworks. Far from avoiding the ‘bias of privileging language,’ semiotics continually reinstates that bias.”

Nelson Goodman's (1976) approach to a variety of sign systems took structuralism in a direction that attempted to avoid the linguistic framework of structuralist thought and its concomitant hierarchies. Its title notwithstanding, *Languages of Art* is an attempt to treat visual depiction alongside other symbolic systems (music notations, maps, charts in addition to language) without assigning values to one over another.¹⁷ In order to do this, he avoids differentiating the arts on the basis of conventional versus

¹⁵ It was, of course, not just to the study of visuality that Saussure's project was applied. It was also hailed as a means of understanding “symbolic” behavior as well. As Catherine Bell (1992) incisively showed, however, this resulted in problematic understandings of ritual and effected a similar subjugation. In that case as well one finds a familiar privileging of verbal understanding over ritual production, abetted by a Protestant distaste for ritual not unlike the distaste for images. Bell's work on ritualization as a solution might be fruitfully brought into the conversation here were there more space to treat it.

¹⁶ But see Bal's (1991) contention that the very division between the visual and the verbal is artificial and essentializing, though the objection, below, to semiotics as neutral remains a problem.

¹⁷ He clarifies in the introduction that vernacular expediency required the title be *Languages of Art* rather than *Symbol Systems of Art*, but that the latter is what was intended (Goodman 1976: xi–xii). In this way he is particularly indebted to the work of Saussure and not to that of Peirce. Though he does not make it explicit, he also advances a subtle (“wonderfully cagey”) reaction against semiotic interpretation (see Mitchell 1991: 25–26).

natural signifiers, arguing instead for systems that prefer more or less dense and replete signifying structures. Density for Goodman operates in an inverse relation to differentiation of the system. Languages are less dense because their constitutive elements are more differentiated, differentiation in language being necessary to the functioning of the system, as Saussure showed. Thus for Goodman pictorial depiction is more dense because less strictly differentiated in its elements. As Mitchell (1986: 67) summarized Goodman, the meaning of an image “depends rather on its relations with all the other marks in a dense, continuous field. A particular spot of paint might be read as the highlight on Mona Lisa’s nose, but that spot achieves its significance in the specific system of pictorial relations to which it belongs, not as a uniquely differentiated character that might be transferred to some other canvas.” Symbols themselves are more or less replete, in Goodman’s terminology, depending on the numbers of properties of the symbols that are taken into account. Since more properties of a picture are implicated in its understanding, the picture is more replete than, say, a linguistic grapheme.

Goodman’s theory not only accounts for movement between systems but also requires an understanding (or recovery) of the conventions determining the viewing. Thus “a paragraph may be turned on its side and ‘read’ as a city skyline; a picture may be riddled with alphabetic characters, and may be constructed to be read from left to right in a descending series of sequences. ... What determines the mode of reading is the symbol system that happens to be in effect, and this is regularly a matter of habit, convention, and authorial stipulation” (Mitchell 1986: 70). While, thus put, it seems Goodman was largely successful in avoiding the gravitational pull of linguistic imperialism, to my mind such a system describes not just the conventionality of perceiving art, but of viewing in general. As Goodman (1976: 103) himself noted, “what one can distinguish at any given moment by merely looking depends not only upon native visual acuity but upon practice and training.”¹⁸ The features of objects – not just depictions – in our visual field are just as semantically loaded as they are in photographs, paintings, and sculptures.¹⁹ It seems that, so read, Goodman is getting at the roots of human perception and cognition, which themselves are caught up in the question of word and image and whether there is a neurological divide between them.²⁰

18 In addition to being an extreme conventionalist, Goodman self-identified as an iconoclast – that is, he argued against resemblance and likeness and in favor of reference and denotation (for example, Hopkins 2006: 156). As Mitchell (1986: 153) notes, however, this is because he leaves out the *roots* of reference (which would presumably require notions of resemblance, similitude, and the like) and focuses instead on the *routes* of reference.

19 For in-depth and recent engagements with and corrections of Goodman, see Kulvicki 2006 and Schwartz 2006.

20 Schwartz (2001) argues that a spatial emplotment of points on a line makes a salient semantic distinction between different types of symbol systems, adding another dimension, as it were, to Goodman’s hypothesis.

It is often claimed in studies of visual representation that seeing a depiction is categorically different from reading a description because the former requires only basic perception but the latter involves higher cognitive processes. Cognitive scientists have shown, however, that the issue is not so simple (Schwartz 2001). Reading appears to be subsumed in the sub-modality of vision and, once learned, is difficult to distinguish from other types of perception. Literate people do not choose to read or not to read a series of shapes that could be construed as well formed utterances in their language. The difficulty involved in “turning off” the perception of words in favor of “basic” perception is illustrated in the Stroop color-word test, whereby subjects are given a list of color words (red, blue, yellow, green) that are themselves set in colored font not corresponding to the colors named. Results of the study demonstrate that subjects have much greater ease reading the color words than naming the color of the ink. This apparently shows reading to be automatic and throws the question of relative cognitive processes between language (at least, written language) and vision into relief.

Another question raised by examining the word-image problem at the neurological level, and by the possibility raised in the discussion of Goodman that viewing pictures and viewing in general are governed by convention and semantic relationships, is that of relative response.²¹ Neurological studies of perception indicate that there is a biological basis for the relationship between the experience of viewing a thing and the experience of viewing a depiction of the same thing. The experience is close enough that studies of nonpictorial spatial perception frequently give their subjects pictures to view (Hecht et al. 2003: xii), instead of being made to go physically into the environment relevant to the study. Further, the discovery and ongoing study of “mirror neurons” – cells that simulate in the brain actions observed or generally perceived as if the viewer were experiencing it directly – suggest that at the level of imitative response the difference between observing images of actions (“representations”) and observing the actions “live” to be smaller than is often admitted.²² This research also shows that mirroring activity is not confined to singular perceptual modalities – vision, hearing, olfaction – but can be triggered by a variety of stimuli, including seeing (including the written word) and hearing.²³ Seen in this light, the cognitive gap between words and images, at least at an experiential level, narrows.

21 The literature on picture perception as specialized viewing is voluminous. See, recently, Wollheim 1989 and 1998; Hecht et al. 2003; Hopkins 2006; Lopes 2005 and 2006; Schwartz 2006; Kulvicki 2006 and 2009.

22 Of the abundant literature on mirror neurons and their implications in a wide variety of human behavior, see Pineda 2009. For theoretical considerations and limitations, see Uithol et al. 2011. For an exemplary study of action simulation in response to pictures, see Ponseti et al. 2006, which showed mirror neuron activations imitating sexual behavior when subjects viewed pictures of aroused genitalia corresponding to the subject’s sexual preference.

23 See, for example, Bastiaansen et al. 2009; Caetano et al. 2007. It bears noting that even the idea of singular perceptual modalities, long a given in neuroscience, has been challenged directly (Uttal 2001). At the very least, the information from sensory modalities is processed in a way that makes sense

At the level of experience, then, the question of representation and (versus) resemblance becomes a more pressing issue. If looking at a picture potentially bears an experiential congruence with the presence of the thing depicted, one is forced to ask whether representation is a sufficient conceptualization of depiction. Strict theories of pictorial representation as opposed to resemblance continue to be advanced, corrected, and challenged.²⁴ As Squire (2009: 116) put it with regard to Greco-Roman antiquity, “our language of ‘representation’ conspicuously fails in this regard, since in antiquity images held the promise of direct ‘presentation’ – of superseding or effacing their purely representative function.” Particularly important to the theoretical challenge of maintaining the “presence” in representation are approaches focused on the viewer’s response to the work of art, not necessarily to what it stands in for or represents. In his attempt to articulate a theory of art that could embrace non-Western art objects as easily as Renaissance painting as well as avoid the pitfalls of semiological approaches, Alfred Gell (1998) drew on anthropological models of distributed personhood to argue for the consideration of art objects as agents mediating social roles. Mitchell (2005: 7) similarly asked why it is that people “behave as if pictures were alive, as if works of art had minds of their own, as if images had a power to influence human beings, demanding things from us, persuading, seducing, and leading us astray?” As others have argued and as we shall see below, these studies articulate a position much closer to emic ways of approaching art objects in the ancient Near East than theories of representation strictly understood.²⁵ They also carry important ramifications for understanding the conjunction of image and text, since, at least for Gell, the depiction need not be figural to exercise agency.²⁶ Discussion of agency requires attention to a variety of aspects of the materiality of the object in question, including textual representation as well as production and emplacement. It need not assume a divide between textual and iconographic spheres and, as such, may better approximate ancient Near Eastern modes of interaction, appreciation, and response.²⁷

In sum, the history of the study of the image-text problem is one that has tended to see pictorial media as subject to or unlocked through verbal media. Some theoretical and neurological work has attempted to provide a basis for understanding them

of even conflicting information from different streams, such as in the McGurk effect, where sound perception is dramatically altered by tampering with visual (but not aural) stimuli.

²⁴ For critical discussions of resemblance versus representation, see Hecht et al. 2003; Schwartz 2006.

²⁵ This is not to say that pictures *cannot* represent – a quick study of the development of writing proves otherwise – but that representation need not be the defining characteristic of depiction as it has been almost exclusively.

²⁶ Indeed, as Porter discusses (2010), non-figural objects, such as jars and bricks, can be seen as mediators of agency. This relies on a different visual experience from that with a figural image, however, and it usually (though not always) is not marked in the same way as the image (*šalmu*).

²⁷ See also, in this same vein, Freedberg 1989; Elkins 1997.

as blended areas along a continuum. These observations have direct bearing on the study of the ancient Near East, both in the history of the discipline and the study of individual objects. It is to this that we now turn, first to the pitfalls and promise of previous studies and then, as an important caution to binary approaches, to the statue of Idrimi as an example of an ancient negation of difference between text and image.

Relating Images and Texts in the Ancient Near East

Images and texts in the ancient Near East co-occur in a wide variety of objects and contexts, including wall reliefs, ornamental wall tiles, bronze doorbands, cylinder and stamp seals, stelae, inscribed tablets with seal impressions, painting on pottery, inscriptions on votive objects and statuary, stone thresholds, and the list goes on. The types of inscriptions borne on objects appear as varied as the object types: labels, captions, curses, biographies, laws, treaties, and so forth. It also bears noting in this light that the methods of bringing together texts and images complicate the picture. In most cases it appears that multiple classes of trained workers (engravers, masons, scribes) were involved in the production of these objects. Though this division of productive labor at the point of creation would undoubtedly contribute to the division of analytical labor in modern receptions, the objects nevertheless were perceived singularly, their texts and depictions co-present for the viewer's examination. Perhaps most vexingly, the problem of images and texts extends to categories in which the two are not conjoined materially but in which nevertheless the question of the relationship is raised. Most obvious in this regard is the question of mythology (Steinkeller 1992; Sonik, this volume), in which scenes known from textual sources are only rarely congruent with imagery attested in the archaeological record.²⁸ Also to be dealt with as a problem of representation is the literary (ekphrastic) description of material objects, such as those discussed by Thomason (2004: 155–57; see also Squire 2009: 96; Mitchell 1994: 151–81). To this one would add collections of texts that were apparently drawn from inscriptions on objects, such as Akkadian statuary, but whose original has been lost to history (Cooper 1990; Marchesi and Marchetti 2011; Eppiheimer, this volume). In sum, the material relations between texts and images in ancient Mesopotamia are manifold, and this fact alone enjoins attention and flexibility in the approach to individual items and classes.

In the context of the abundant ways in which images and texts were physically and conceptually brought together, approaches to the problem seem to have come, with important exceptions, to settle most comfortably on the division between text

²⁸ Even though Steinkeller seems at points to be motivated toward the use of imagery to reconstruct ancient literature, he recognizes the problems inherent in yoking the texts too closely to the images. For a similar debate concerning Homeric epic and/in Greek art, see Snodgrass 1998, contra Johansen 1967, and the criticism of both in Squire 2009: 124.

and image, between philologist and art historian (Bahrani 2003). The relationship between the textual and visual materials at the level of the academy has been rehearsed in several publications, mostly by scholars trained in and attentive to visual material (for example, Winter 1997; Bahrani 2003; Porter 2010). As should be expected from the above observations, what emerges is an overwhelming priority of texts, not simply in quantity of studies, but also in methodology, at least in part because of broader philosophical trends treated above.

It should not be surprising at this point that the idea of reading images as texts has been a captivating one and continues to inform studies of Mesopotamian art and architecture. It has proven to be especially attractive in studies of the extensive Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs (for example, Reade 1979; Winter 1981; Russell 1993; Lumsden 2004). On a broader scale, however, communication in general – understood as fundamentally linked, at least at the theoretical level, to assumptions and frameworks derived from specifically verbal communication – has also been held up as the defining characteristic of Mesopotamian visual production. Michalowski (1990) characterized Mesopotamian art as an early communicative system (with literature and writing), explicitly understanding images as a semiotic code. May (2012: 6) similarly situated the destruction of images and texts in the ancient Near East within symbol systems. A main theme of the 2004 ICAANE (Kühne et al. 2008) was dedicated to art history (including architecture) as visual communication defined, in Saussurean terms, by messages, senders, and receivers.²⁹ Far more common than these explicit treatments that are unapologetically logocentric are, of course, studies in which the assumptions outlined above operate in the background, including those that without explanation crop the focus to exclude the visual dimension and to include the text only, or vice versa.³⁰ On the other hand, some recent trends have gained traction in showing the possibilities for moving away from the model of language and communication and even away from the strong bifurcation of text and image altogether.

Irene Winter (1985) sees the relationship between the text and imagery on the Stele of the Vultures as one of independent goals that were nevertheless held in tension in their incorporation on the single stele. Moreover, she noted the different modes exhibited in the visual content on the obverse and reverse of the stele as evoking mythic/historical, iconic/narrative, or temporal/eternal dimensions. Even exploring here the beginnings of narrative art, with the concomitant reliance on literary studies of narrative, Winter (1985: 28) uses this as a way of getting at what Mitchell (1994: 89) called the “whole ensemble of relations between media,” stressing

29 See in particular the treatments in Kühne et al. 2008 by Bonatz, Pucci, Sievertsen, and Orthmann. Pucci's (2008: 545) statement is indicative: “It is a well-known fact that art through its images carries a form of communication. Such communication exists between a sender – that is the artist and his customer – and the receivers of the information, those who will see the works of art.”

30 There are also the rare studies in which ancient Near Eastern texts are classified visually as icons themselves. See, for example, Levto 2012 and discussion below.

in the end as she did the “*affective*, as opposed to the merely *reflective*, properties of the monument – the fact that monuments *constitute* the objects they represent as much as they mirror them, and are thus active agents in projecting particular responses in reception.”

The correspondence of textual and pictorial narrative has been widely discussed in regard to Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs from Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh. Winter (1981) had argued for a dynamic but unexpected interaction between the images of the throneroom of the northwest palace at Nimrud with the “standard inscription,” the latter being especially interesting for a lack of direct correspondence with the scenes shown pictorially. Winter posited that the royal aspects generally enunciated in the inscriptions – which were inscribed in some cases right over the surface of the scenes, without regard for background – were evinced in the pictorial representations even though a direct correspondence was lacking. Russell’s (1999) extensive study of available texts and images takes this further, discussing not only the relationships between the two evidenced in the reign of a particular monarch, but also charting the changes made by successors as themselves results of a dynamic interaction of word and image. He dispenses with the need to find semantic correspondence between visual and verbal data; even though, in the case of Assurnasirpal, the texts and images had “nothing to do with each other” at the level of direct content but that the “generalized, universalized image of the king, insistently reinforced through endless [textual] repetition, exists as a parallel to the more concrete images expressed in the sculptures” (Russell 1999: 213). This would not remain the case, as, for example, Tiglath-pileser III would not only introduce labels to the wall reliefs, he also brought text and image into closer correspondence. This was not a one-way, teleological development, as Sennacherib and Assurbanipal would reject long annalistic texts on wall reliefs altogether. Assurbanipal, however, did greatly expand the use of epigraphs, which bring text and image into an indexical relationship. About these, Russell (1999: 216) says that “on the one hand, it is tempting to say that pictures have finally triumphed over text, and it is true that the visible texts now seem slavishly to follow the story of the pictures.” On the other, he goes on, the narratives may well have provided the source from which the images were executed. “Therefore, while a walk through the palace would have left no doubt that pictures had triumphed over words as the dominant mode of public expression, every one of these pictures probably began as a text, a genesis whose fossil remains are visible on the relief surface in the form of epigraphs” (Russell 1999: 216). While Assyrian kings exhibit changing preferences for verbal and visual correspondence, the dynamic interplay between the two is maintained and developed in a fusion of innovation and tradition. The case of Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs and texts reveals the willingness of Assyrian patrons and artisans to experiment and react to verbal and visual interchange.

Zainab Bahrani’s (2001) study of the Warka vase also attempts to move beyond the basic assignment of narrativity to the imagery. Arguing that the self-referentiality of the object (on which is depicted an object identical in shape to itself) allows it to be

treated as the visual version of a performative speech act, she calls into question the suitability of the binaries essence/appearance and signifier/signified because the Warka vase itself blurs these distinctions: “The circular referentiality in these works cannot be explained in the limited understanding of narrative as a form of communication of a singular meaning via different but parallel codes of reference. They cannot be understood as the vehicle or the site of the passage of meaning because they are performative images” (Bahrani 2001: 22). Her (2003: 185–201) later discussion of the altar of Tukulti-Ninurta makes similar claims about the altar that depicts one identical to itself with the (doubled) monarch approaching it, with the added interest, for our purposes, of being complicated by an inscription that refers to the god Nusku, while the symbol on the depicted altar refers apparently to Nabu. Such disjunction provides fertile ground for reflection, and Bahrani (2003: 197) harmonizes the two by arguing for the transfer of the usual Nabu symbols to Nusku.³¹ Thus in both of these images, as with other Assyro-Babylonian “object self-portraits” (Cheng 2007), the bifurcation of word/image as well as of representation/presence are called into question in ways that suggest a dynamic interplay left underexamined in previous work.

Marian Feldman also departs from the model of language and communication in the examination of art objects. One of her more recent works (2010) exemplifies the power of the concept of agency in the depiction of Hammurabi and Shamash on the stele of Hammurabi in its role as an agentive object.³² Citing, among others, the work of Gell (1998) on art objects as mediators of social relations, she argues that the developments of perspectival rendering had direct bearing on the way the viewer was drawn into the scene. These developments therefore acted with agentive force in relating the viewer to the subject matter. Further, the new technique of rendering perspective, argues Feldman (2010: 161), goes hand in hand with important political changes in the Old Babylonian period to show the agency of the object “as operating as a central component in the fashioning of the ‘subject’ that found expression in new ways of *seeing* the relationship between subject and king.” Putting this together with Stephanie Langin-Hooper’s (n.d.) argument that the visual aspect of the monument cannot be understood without reference to the visual dimensions of the text inscribed below the relief, one is able then to connect the perspectival shift in the upper scene with the changing social role of law during the period as the territorial state emerges from the city-state network. Thus the relationship between image, text, and viewer plays a role in constituting as well as reflecting changing political relationships. Taken together, these studies of text and image on the stele of Hammurabi show the combination of word and image to be greater than the sum of

³¹ But see the important objections in Feldman 2004 and the discussion of the problems of correspondence in comparison below.

³² For other studies of agency in the ancient Near East, including theoretical reactions from historians of ancient art, see Osborne and Tanner 2007, especially Winter’s (2007) essay in the volume.

its “parts” and that such objects narrow the modern assumed distance between verbal and visual modes of display.

The Statue of Idrimi

A final example of conjoined text and image indicates a further dimension of ancient Near Eastern approaches to imagetexts.

The statue of Idrimi was discovered broken and buried in a temple complex at Alalakh in 1939 by C. Leonard Woolley (Fig. 1) (Smith 1949). It depicts a bearded man in “provincial style” (Barnett 1950) seated on a chair, his left hand curled into a fist resting near his lap, his right hand clapped across his chest. An inscription follows the contours of the body and covers the shoulders, chest, arms, and skirt of the figure such that the entirety could be seen by a frontally positioned viewer. This inscription has been the clear focal point of analytical attention. The modern significance of the statue of Idrimi has been squarely located in the contents of its inscription: “what makes it significant,” according to Speiser (1951: 151) “is a long inscription of over a hundred lines”; Albright (1950:14) similarly hailed it as a “document of great historical importance.” Indeed, it is the inscription that continues to attract the greatest analytical attention (for example, Liverani 1972; King 1987; Westbrook 2008), especially in light of its apparent divergence from Assyro-Babylonian historiography and similarity to biblical narrative (for example, Sasson 1981; Van Seters 1997). Perhaps most logocentric is Oppenheim’s (1955: 199) evaluation: “The lifeless features of the sculpture, the struggle of the artist with the articulation of its dimensions, the barbaric misuse of the linguistic vehicle, the abominable paleography, etc., should not detract from an adequate appreciation of the *literary* merits of this autobiography” (emphasis added).

Often overlooked – I would argue because of scholarly engagement with the inscription in published form instead of the object itself – is the fact that the final lines, labeled 102–104 in the *editio princeps* (Smith 1949: 10, 22–23) run vertically down his beard, beginning at the level of the fold of his right eye and running down to the point at which it meets perpendicularly the level of the main inscription, the block of text comprised of lines 1–23 (Fig. 2). Following Oller (1977), who discovered a crucial lacuna in pre-1977 publications of ll. 102–104, we read: “I was king for 30 years. As for my deeds (*mānaḫtiya*), I wrote them on my image (*ṣalmīya*). Let one continually look at (*liddagal*) them; let them [the deeds] continually bless me.”³³ As the positioning immediately suggests, the content of these lines, sometimes dubbed a “postscript” (for example, Oller 1977), do not function as a typical conclusion or epilogue (Sasson 1981),

³³ Oller (1977: 168) argues that the signs of the verb at the end of line 103 should be restored *li-‘dag’-gal-šu-nu*.

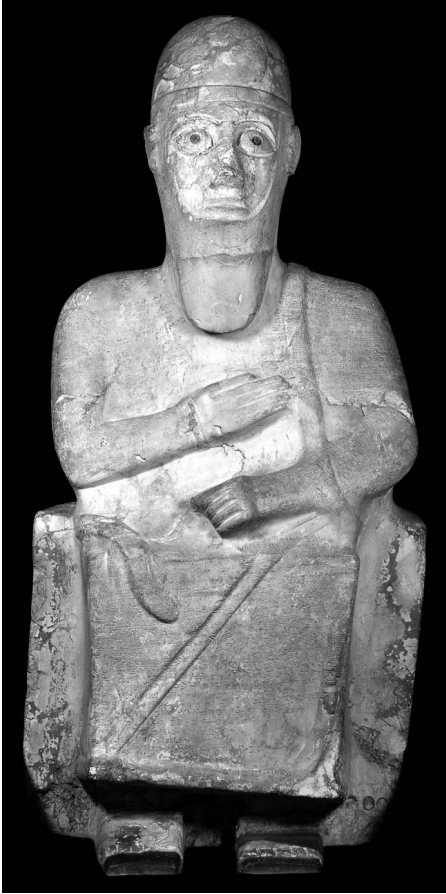


Figure 1: The Statue of Idrimi.
© Trustees of the British Museum.

either in linguistic or spatial context. The customary conclusory curses against future vandalism that so frequently constitute the last lines on monuments occur here in ll. 92–98, followed by an (also irregular) appendix identifying Sharruwa in the third person as scribe and invoking a blessing on him in ll. 98–101. At this point in publications and translations scholars usually place ll. 102–104, without noting that we have moved to the head of the statue, and back to the (spatial) beginning of the inscription. One presumes this is due to the fact that it speaks of inscribing the statue in the past tense and that the audience can now therefore consult it.

While these may have temporally been the last lines incised onto the statue, they perhaps fit better as a standalone composition. When one considers the content of these lines in conjunction with its material presence, a different picture emerges. The plural in the last clause must refer to the achievements of Idrimi, not to a putative plural audience (Oller 1977). What is perhaps most remarkable about these lines is the conceptual and visual bridge they form between the ruler/statue, the inscription, and



Figure 2: Detail, Statue of Idrimi.
Photo courtesy Benjamin Spackman.

the ruler's past. They are conscious of their representation of cuneiform not only as speech, but at the same time as the past events inscribed on the body of the ruler. Lines 102–104 point literally to the inscription on the body not only as a type of epigram or even cartoon speech bubble (Sasson 1981: 313), but also to the cuneiform signs as a visible instantiation of Idrimi's deeds. We recall that the lines enjoin not an act of reading, as had been supposed before Oller's re-examination, but an act of iterative *viewing*, as indicated by the probable use of *dagālu* in the Gtn stem.³⁴ In light of this verb, the fact that the inscription runs not from the mouth of Idrimi, but from his right eye to the deeds presented in the inscription gains added significance. Thus

³⁴ Cf. CAD s.v. "*dagālu*."

the viewer is visually as well as verbally enjoined not to read or to inspect the inscription solely as a text, but rather to see the deeds of Idrimi by viewing the inscription on his body, to connect the eye to the inscription as does the statue itself. It is significant in light of this claim to note that the inscription as a whole does not extend to the throne on which he sits – it is confined to the body of Idrimi himself. Thus, in what amounts to a kind of verbal hypallage, the acts of the ruler cling ontologically to him, visually constituted and open to the viewer's devoted gaze (compare Winter 1992; 2000). We see a conscious effort to effect, in other words, a visual reckoning with what is treated in the academy almost exclusively in its literary or linguistic dimensions. If we accept Sasson's (1981) contention that, owing to the rare colophon invoking the blessing of the scribe Sharruwa (ll. 98–101), the inscription is better understood as “memorial” written by Sharruwa in the first person rather than an autobiography commissioned by the king or his successor, we see immediately the impact of the convergence of image and text for Sharruwa's own political purposes. If indeed responsible for the final configuration of the stele, Sharruwa has ensured the difficulty of reading the inscription as other than *autobiography* by his placement of the narrative on the body of the king. He has also indicated a mode of viewing image *and* text as constitutive and ontological rather than representational, incorporating verbal and visual in the *šalmu* (Bahrani 2003: 121–48).

The idea of texts as available for visual reckoning is one that dovetails with the concept of object agency and with previous studies of the visual dimensions of text in the ancient Near East (for example, Russell 1999: 230; Langin-Hooper n.d.; May 2012). One of the clearest examples of a textual object as a mediator of social relations is found in the recent discovery of a cuneiform “oath tablet” inscribed with a vassal treaty of Esarhaddon in Building XVI – a long-axis temple – at Tell Tayinat (Harrison and Osborne 2012; Lauinger 2012). The tablet, pierced horizontally, likely for mounting on a wall, was found in situ in the cella along with amulet-shaped tablets, suggesting that it was placed there specifically for display and even that it was found where it fell from its mount (Harrison and Osborne 2012: 137).³⁵ If the excavators are correct in their argument that the tablet was placed in the inner sanctum for display, we might conclude that this placement was intended to ensure the subject's adherence to the terms of the treaty through its *viewing* (Steymans 2006). This idea finds perhaps its strongest evidence in the text itself, where the governor of Kunalia is commanded to “guard like your god this sealed tablet of the great ruler on which is written the *adê* of Assurbanipal ... which is set up before you” (Lauinger 2012: 112; see also Scurlock 2012: 178).³⁶ Like the words inscribed on the body of Idrimi, the Tayinat

35 The discovery of tablets in temples is not unusual. For examples from Assyria proper, see discussion in Harrison and Osborne 2012: 137.

36 Lauinger (2012: 178) shows clearly that the object of the verb “guard” (*našāru*) is the tablet itself and not specifically the words of the oath. He suggests, furthermore, that “the verb might convey the sense of obeying or heeding the (divine) sealed tablet's stipulations as if they were divine commands” (*ibid.*).

oath tablet was a visual instantiation of past events, in this case an oath mediating a relationship between Assyria and its vassal. The agentive status of the item, further, might be supposed from the ritualized obliteration of such tablets, parallel to the mutilation of figural images during conquest or other social upheaval (Levtow 2012; Scurlock 2012).

Conclusions

I have hoped to lay out here some of the most pressing concerns with and prevalent approaches to the relationships between word and image in the ancient Near East and to show that there might be something crucial gained if, rather than asking how Mesopotamian rulers and patrons communicated, signaled, and broadcast their messages, we examined how their imagetexts instantiated, constituted, and embodied their authority, presence, or history. Although this and previous studies have highlighted the (often undue) influence of logocentric hierarchies in differentiating image and word, it is not to say that semiotic or representational approaches must be excised from the discipline – rather, that they take their place beside analyses that appreciate texts and images in their material and ontological dimensions. Neither can be reduced to the other. Images can signify, and texts can be iconic. With Winter (2007: 61–62), I would say that “instead of having to choose ‘art as a system of action intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it,’ one is enjoined to see art both as a system of meaning encoding propositions about the world and as a system of action intended to change the world, precisely because the excitation generated by the work lies in the interaction between the two.” My concern here has been to show that the terminal reduction of images, or indeed, the whole of the Mesopotamian visual (and textual) corpus, to messages, statements, and narratives runs the risk of eliding the material presence crucial for their reception and of ignoring positive native indications of how such were to be reckoned with. It risks blinding the observer to the ways in which non-verbal dimensions such as materiality, presence, and agency might inform the study of texts known to us and to ancient audiences exclusively through their material presentation as well as to the dynamics of the reciprocal interaction of text and image on such objects. The hope is that laying bare some of the hidden assumptions that tend strongly to inform studies of imagetexts can open the conversation to a richer appreciation of the dynamic ways ancient Mesopotamians negotiated the relations between language and depiction.

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Karen Sonik

Pictorial Mythology and Narrative in the Ancient Near East

Abstract: This study assesses the strategic deployment and polysemic functioning of mythological imagery in both the official (*Machtkunst*) and popular arts of Mesopotamia. It also addresses, as a corollary, such issues as the definition and status of art and the artist in the ancient Near East; the relationship between patron and artist or artisan; the implications of mass production or the deliberate copying of certain art forms or images, as through the use of molds or sketch- or pattern-“books”; degrees of literacy among the general population, and especially among those involved in the crafting of individual artworks or the designing of larger visual programs; the cultural role of mythology in Mesopotamia and the relationship between those myths extant in writing and those (now lost) circulating as oral compositions; and the striking mismatch between text and image, and especially between written (Sumerian and Akkadian) mythological narrative and pictorial narrative or visual mythological representation. It is concluded that the numerous and varied mythologies of Mesopotamia, both oral and written, were conventionalized through two deliberate visual strategies: (1) the circulation and replication of certain figural stereotypes; and (2) the visual representation of even complex mythological scenes or episodes in iconic form. Both strategies yielded a conventionalized composition capable of circulating independently of any single or immutable signification, allowing for its flexible deployment and investment with meaning by those representing it and its interpretation on multiple levels by a diverse audience of heterogeneous cultural knowledge and experience.

Keywords: Ancient Near East, art, artist, artisan, contest scene, icon, literacy, *Machtkunst*, mass production, Mesopotamia, mythology, pictorial narrative, popular art, text

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Introduction

Mythology was not a universal language in the Near East – or, at least, the mythological narratives that have survived to the modern day through their recording on clay tablets did not hold the central place in Mesopotamian culture that myths are tradi-

tionally assumed to hold.¹ These narratives seem to have been restricted in circulation primarily to scribal (and, perhaps, court) circles and were at minimum different versions of, and perhaps even entirely divergent from, any living oral mythology or traditional tales from which they might have been adapted or with which they might have had features in common.² It only follows, then, that the depiction of this mythology could not easily function as an effective means or strategy of visual communication for official art, lacking salience for or relevance to any wider (and likely uninitiated) audience, and that its deployment would, for this reason, have been limited. Moreover, it seems likely that any popular art actually originating with or designed by typically illiterate (or only functionally literate)³ artists would primarily draw upon, where it represented mythological figures or themes at all, oral or traditional tales perhaps entirely unfamiliar to us. While such oral compositions might in some few cases bear sufficient resemblance to known written narratives as to suggest a possible correlation, they might well in other cases remain unidentified – and unidentifiable.

It is striking, given these conditions, that a rich corpus of mythological imagery is yet extant from ancient Mesopotamia. Fantastic compositions constructed around gods, heroes, and monsters are, indeed, known already from the glyptic and other imagery of the late fourth millennium BCE, when the first cities were arising in Mesopotamia's southern plains, and continue to appear through to (and beyond) the fall of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires in the mid-first millennium. This study, consequently, addresses itself broadly to the evaluation of potential strategies for and functions of the deployment of mythological imagery in both popular (personal or domestic) and official visual contexts, and to the question of how such imagery might best be approached, identified, and understood. Necessarily, it includes also a consideration of the definition and functioning of art and the artist in the ancient world, the nature of the relationship between oral, written, and pictorial narrative in Mesopotamia, and the relationship between text and image as evinced on extant artworks and monuments.

¹ This work is part of a larger study on the relationship between visual art and written narrative in Mesopotamia (forthcoming from the author). A much-expanded discussion of the nature and definition of the written and oral mythology of the region is included therein.

² There is no single version of most of the extant narratives. Rather, the “text” as we know it is an ideal but unreal pastiche, a composite reconstruction drawing on a range of variant copies or fragments recovered from different cities, regions, or even time periods (see Michalowski 1989: 25).

³ Functional literacy would have enabled the reading or writing of letters and completion of other mundane tasks (see Veldhuis 2011), but would be insufficient to access or to be introduced to the mythological narratives that were part of advanced scribal training or restricted scholarly lore.

Art and the Artist in the Ancient World

There do not exist any explicit or even implicit native equivalents for the terms or categories of art and artist in Mesopotamia. In applying these classifications to the ancient Near East, then, it is vital to delineate their specific parameters and connotations.

The term “art” has long been a *bête noire* for scholars treating both non-Western and ancient visual corpora. The persisting definition of artworks as “objects of disinterested aesthetic contemplation,” of “art for art’s sake,” emerged during the Enlightenment in Europe, developing against the backdrop of rapidly altering socioeconomic conditions as commerce and manufacturing enterprises generated new wealth and challenged the existing class system in Europe: connoisseurship, in this context, and the exalting of an aesthetic divorced from the utilitarian, were indicators of the “polite” status and prestige to which the newly wealthy aspired.⁴ The art of the ancient world, however, and of the Near East in particular, necessarily straddles those lines that have been drawn in recent centuries between art and craft, between fine and applied art, and between art and artifact – this should not be regarded, however, as detracting in any way from its existence *as* art and as possessed of an important aesthetic component.⁵ Defined (necessarily) broadly by Winter (1995: 2570) as “any work that is imaginatively conceptualized and that affords visual and emotional satisfaction, for which manufacturing skill is required and to which some established standards have been applied,”⁶ the extant corpus of Mesopotamian art reflects significant religious, political, and social concerns and was designed to act both in and

4 The development of the Western concept of a “work of art” as an evaluative as well as classificatory category arguably dates only to the Enlightenment (see Abrams 1985). The delineation of fine art as utterly divorced from the utilitarian or the functional is in all periods a problematic one, even in regard to the Western art of recent centuries for which it was developed; its application to non-Western (as so-called “primitive art”) and ancient visual corpora, however, has been particularly pejorative and problematic.

5 An essential introduction to the theoretical and methodological issues relating to ancient art, though taking African art as its starting point, is provided in a trio of articles by Danto 1988, Dutton 1993, and Gell 1996. More recently, for thoughtful commentaries on art as a human universal existing also in non-Western and ancient contexts, see Dissanayake 2008; Dutton 2009; Morphy 2010. See, also, Thomason in this volume.

6 Drawing on the extant written sources of this region, Winter (1995) also reconstructed a number of the affective attributes possessed by Mesopotamian artworks and the criteria according to which their aesthetic qualities might be assessed. This delineation of a culturally specific “way of seeing” Mesopotamian art is very much in the mode of Baxandall’s “period eye” (Baxandall 1988; 1980: 143–63). While the definition of a cultural aesthetic was located by scholars such as Price and Morphy within the sphere of an anthropology of art, Gell anchored it instead within the discipline of art history, arguing that the anthropology of art properly pursued “the social context of art production, circulation, and reception, rather than the evaluation [according to any aesthetic system, culturally specific or otherwise] of particular works of art” (Gell 1998: 2–3). The Mesopotamian visual corpus, which includes

on the world.⁷ Capable of demonstrating remarkable technical mastery and including works that are aesthetically compelling by any standard of judgment, the visual corpus includes also a range of crudely or hastily formed as well as mass-produced (mold-made) works that, even where they do not appeal to our personal aesthetic sensibilities, yet have as much claim to the title of art as any acknowledged Renaissance masterpiece.⁸

It is hardly surprising, in such circumstances, that those who created or at least executed the visual arts of Mesopotamia, and of the ancient world in general, little conform to the image of the artist as genius, an individual personality capable of unique and remarkable acts of creation, as it emerged from the early Renaissance (Panofsky 1962). Even in ancient Greece, which produced such brilliant personalities as Myron, Pheidias, and Praxiteles, the artist was not defined by, nor his work judged against, the qualities of originality, autonomy, or imagination (Shiner 2001: 23). In Mesopotamia, sculptors, seal- and stone-carvers, woodworkers, and smiths might alike be recognized as artisans or craftsmen (*mār ummênim* at Mari in Syria) but were described in this capacity alongside barbers, scribes, physicians, cooks, gardeners, and other palace workers and bureaucrats (Gunter 1990: 12; Sasson 1990). Credit for the artworks (as cult statues) or architectural constructions they completed would typically, where explicitly bestowed at all, be assigned to a god or king as originator rather than to any individual artist or artisan as executor.⁹

those artworks that accompanied the rise and development of the earliest human cities and civilization, offers substantial grist for both disciplinary mills regardless of their definitions.

⁷ This is not to say that the visual corpus of Mesopotamia does not constitute art, or that it lacks an aesthetic component. Recent treatments, as those suggesting that “visual art in the ancient world was not generally meant to please or to decorate... Ancient art was first and foremost a form of magico-religious expression serving the needs of a religion, bound with those of the ruling elite and the sovereign” (Ornan 2005: 8–9), or that the visual imagery encountered by the inhabitants of the Near East was not “‘art’ in the aesthetic sense of the word” (Ross 2005: 327), have tended (if unintentionally) to perpetuate the view that the visual corpus of the ancient Near East stands somehow outside the canon of art, utterly alien to and divorced from our own multifaceted experience.

⁸ For the study of art as a technical system or as a system of action, see Gell 1992, 1998; also the valuable critiques in Tanner and Osborne 2007, Morphy 2009, and, dealing specifically with Mesopotamian material, Winter 2007. For the complex relationships between people and artworks, the latter themselves functioning as social agents, see also Freedberg 1989; Mitchell 2004. Further potentialities for the study of ancient art are afforded by the consideration of art itself as a behavioral complex or process, a means of “making special,” rather than a product or outcome (see Dissanayake 1992, 2000).

⁹ For divine involvement in creative effort (visual and literary), see Winter 1995: 2571. For the effacement of individual artists in the creation of art, see Gell 1999: 52; Helms 1993: 77–87.

Artists and Agency: Innovation, Design, and Execution

Some of the text archives extant from the ancient Near East, that from Middle Bronze Age Mari in particular (ca. 18th century BCE), offer useful insight into the developing social status and organization of artisans or craft specialists. Often holding lifetime positions in palace or temple workshops, these artists might be assigned to a range of short- or long-term projects located variously in the capital or in the periphery, or, on occasion, to foreign courts at the express request of foreign rulers. If they were rarely explicitly identified as slaves, the evidence from Mari indicates they could yet be forcibly restrained and assiduously sought out should they run away (Gunter 1990: 12–13; Zaccagnini 1983: 247; Moorey 2001: 7).

If the artists of the ancient Near East were highly valued for their technical mastery, then, this value did not necessarily translate into the sort of personal socioeconomic status that it might command in the contemporary world. Moreover, attached as they were to palace or temple complexes, regardless of whether they were free or enslaved, these specialists were likely quite constrained in their personal creative agency, at least insofar as choice and execution of specific visual content is concerned. Much of the surviving corpus of Mesopotamian art in particular (delineated below) might be characterized as *Machtkunst*: it is official art designed to function in the service of the polity and its ruling authority. The decorative programs for art originating from or intended for temple and palace contexts would certainly be specifically commissioned or dictated in detail, and in some cases actually outlined, by an appointed master designer, by officials of the relevant institutions, or even by the king himself, despite being actually executed by one or more artisans (Moorey 1999: 16, 34–35).¹⁰

In addition to the recognition of official art-making in the ancient world as an often collaborative affair, the utilization of sketch- or pattern-“books” by Near Eastern artists – these presumably circulating on perishable materials – and the reuse or imitation of old or venerable visual conventions have long been postulated to explain so-called iconographic stereotypes or stock motifs appearing in official as well as more popular art forms and recurring sometimes centuries after they were innovated.¹¹ If this model accounts for the geographical and temporal dissemination and recurrence of certain images or figures in the art of the region, it also suggests the

10 In theory, a possible distinction between artist and artisan in such a context might be based on the extent to which one was the designer (the artist proper) as well as the executor (the artisan) of a work; in practice, the absence of associated textual evidence makes establishing such a distinction impossible.

11 On sketch- or pattern-books, see Breniquet 2002: 152; Collon 1986: 4, 89; Moorey 1999: 34, 104. On emulation of venerable images, see Garrison 2012: 31–32. On surviving sketches and sculptural models, see Gunter 1990: 13, 16, n. 24; Moorey 1999: 104–105.

means whereby specific motifs might be divested of their original meanings and imbued with new ones (both by the artist as producer and by the viewer as consumer) appropriate to their new temporal, geographical, or socio-cultural contexts (Woolley 1961: 111).¹² *Explicit* innovation or independent creative impulse on the part of the artist or artisan in the Near East, or at least any acknowledgment of such, appears thus deliberately veiled or outright suppressed: this is not surprising in a context in which a literary- or artwork's message or signification might depend at least partly on its location within the established stream of tradition, or in which the authoritative status of a work might derive from its attributed origins in the divine realm.¹³

Further pertinent to this discussion is the likelihood that the majority of artists or artisans at work in the Near East, enslaved or otherwise, were illiterate or, at best, only functionally literate – and so unlikely to have received the type of in-depth scribal training sufficient to *directly* access scribal lore, this including such mythological narratives in written form as survive to the modern day. That they might yet be indirectly familiar with content from these narratives is not impossible: various of the mythological compositions circulating in scribal contexts may have overlapped to a degree with oral or traditional tales while others were recited or perhaps even performed.¹⁴ There is little reason to suspect, however, that this familiarity would have been an intimate or very profound one, or that it necessarily corresponded in any significant detail to the specific *versions* of those narratives that have survived in written form to the present day.¹⁵ Where artists had the opportunity to originate visual mythological compositions, then, as in popular or domestic art forms, we might reasonably postulate that they would draw upon *oral* literature for inspiration and that the scenes represented might address themes or episodes or concerns perhaps entirely divergent from those of the myths recorded on the surviving written tablets. Where artists were employed in the creation of official art, however, their illiteracy

12 On the interregional transmission of motifs through the minor arts and the detachment of form from culturally specific meaning, see Uehlinger 2000: xxv; Pittman 1996. On the mass-produced clay plaques as “vehicles for the spread of artistic information and the means by which a standardized though diverse repertoire of images was developed,” see Auerbach 1994: 12.

13 This is not to say that court-attached artisans made no independent contribution to finished artworks, see Gunter 1990: 17 n. 30.

14 For the oral and aural aspects of the narrative texts, see Michalowski 1992; for the performance of these narratives, see (most recently) Wilcke 2012.

15 Key issues regarding the “transposability of the story” and whether narratives indeed comprise structures fundamentally independent of any single medium – as, in this case, written composition vs. visual representation – were delineated in Chatman 1978: 20; see also critiques and further elucidation of these issues in Smith 2004. A rare apparent example of divergent written and visual *versions* of a single narrative episode from Mesopotamia is provided by the image of the conflict between the hero god Assur and his enemy Tiamat on one of Sennacherib's bronze gates (now lost but described in inscription K 1356), which diverges sharply from the narrative account of the confrontation in *Enuma elish*.

would represent no material barrier to illustrating even those mythological narratives that circulated exclusively in the scribal domain; court or temple officials, after all, including those with in-depth scholarly and scribal training, might well be involved in the design of specific artworks and visual programs.

If the above hypotheses on the role of the artist and the nature of mythological imagery in both official and popular art forms in Mesopotamia appear reasonable, to what extent are they actually borne out in the surviving imagery? And what do the surviving artworks from Mesopotamia tell us about the interface between text (narrative or otherwise) and image, and the interaction – in regard to both production processes and reception or consumption – between those who were literate and those who were illiterate?

Official and “Popular” Art: Origins, Functioning, and the Interface between Text and Image

The rise of Mesopotamia’s urban civilization in the last centuries of the fourth millennium BCE coincided with a number of remarkable technological and social innovations, among these the re-establishment of a sophisticated long-distance trading network;¹⁶ the development of the cuneiform writing system and the cylinder seal as administrative and record-keeping technologies, cylinder seals functioning as intimate personal signifiers and concomitantly acquiring amuletic properties (Reiner 1987; Collon 1987: 108–10); and the deliberate utilization of art and monumental architecture to express and disseminate the ideological concerns and *Weltanschauung* of the new cities and their ruling elite. Much of what survives to comprise the extant corpus of Mesopotamian art, indeed, is of this type: visual compositions once adorning royal palaces or elite residences or dedicated in or rendered on the temples of deities, commissioned to advertise or commemorate the deeds of kings or to embellish the homes of or otherwise glorify or venerate the gods.¹⁷

This state of affairs is at least partly rooted in environmental conditions. The dearth of natural resources such as high quality timber or stone in southern Mesopotamia especially meant that even monumental architecture – including temples and royal palaces – was constructed primarily of mudbrick. Materials such as basalt, gypsum, and limestone¹⁸ (used for large-scale architectural accents or for monuments

¹⁶ For an earlier Ubaid Period exchange network, see Carter and Philip 2010; Gibson 2010; Parker 2010.

¹⁷ This does not and should not preclude a multifaceted approach to and analysis of this art, one that includes aesthetic considerations (see Winter 1995; also see above).

¹⁸ Limestone, gypsum, and various river stones were available to some extent in parts of the south, Moorey (1999: 21).

such as stelae or statues); lapis lazuli, carnelian, amethyst, and agate (used for cylinder seals, jewelry, or small-scale decoration in public buildings); and gold, silver, copper, and lead (used for personal ornaments, tools, and weapons), were mostly imported and accessible primarily to the elite classes as prestige goods or otherwise reserved for temple or palace contexts (Moorey 1999: 21–36).

While northern Mesopotamia was rather more resource rich, with a comparative abundance of various types of stone and timber, access to precious or semi-precious stones and metals and large scale stone blocks for architectural ornament or monuments would have been restricted even there. The quarrying and transport of alabaster panels for the famous Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs or the giant stone blocks hewn into the monumental *lamassu* gateway guardians (human-headed winged lions and bulls), for example, required command of a massive labor force despite the “local” availability of these materials. The corollary of this situation is that much of Mesopotamia’s so-called “popular art,”¹⁹ broadly defined as art emerging from or primarily used in domestic or personal contexts – including, perhaps, textiles, leather works, and clay or mud objects – was made from materials that were inexpensive, widely accessible, and, frequently, perishable. Clay objects are exceptional among this list; where not overlooked by early archaeologists or deliberately discarded as rubbish, baked clay and kiln-fired mudbrick objects survive in significant quantities.²⁰ Small-scale figurines and plaques from the Ur III and Old Babylonian Periods in particular are frequently characterized as examples of this otherwise elusive popular art, produced and consumed outside the sphere of official commissions and capable of offering insight into the daily lives and concerns of the population at large of the ancient Near East (see also Langin-Hooper, this volume).

Miniature in size, typically 5–20 cm in height, and frequently mold-made (mass-produced) or otherwise constructed to standards that preclude any significant display of individual technical virtuosity,²¹ what the clay plaques in particular do demonstrate is a striking variety of subjects not duplicated on elite or luxury goods or in monumental (official) art. Rare images of erotic acts and scenes from daily life are depicted in addition to a range of both familiar and unfamiliar “mythological” figures such as

19 There is a spectrum rather than a polarity between popular/domestic/personal and official/ high/ elite art, and the location of any individual artwork on this spectrum depends on its context and audience at any single point in time. The recognition of art as mutable and changeable over its lifetime, possessed of various affordances or latencies that emerge only under specific circumstances or in specific interactions, has been well developed in theoretical studies on materiality and the cultural biography of objects and things (see, for example, Graves-Brown 2000; Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999) and recently applied in a specifically Mesopotamian context in Feldman 2009.

20 For the symbolic significance of clay, see Moorey 1999: 162–66, 302ff.; Wengrow 1998.

21 For mass production as expediting the incorporation of new and diverse imagery into the standardized image repertoire, see Auerbach 1994. Arguably, copying or mass replication might contribute to the magical efficacy of the plaques through establishing an image as an icon or archetype, see Assante 2002: 17–18.



Figure 1: Old Babylonian Period Baked Clay Plaque (ca. 2000-1600 BCE); Bull-Man Holding a Gatepost; 12.8 (h) x 7 (w) cm (BM 103225).
© Trustees of the British Museum.

gods, goddesses, and monsters (Figures 1–3). The varied nature of the plaques’ imagery, importantly, belies any single or simple explanation for their functioning as, for instance, objects of religious devotion. More, their unobtrusive positioning, with excavated examples originally located in niches or on shelves within both public buildings such as temples and private ones such as houses and chapels (Auerbach 1994: 19–22), as well as the rendering on them of figures (such as the bull-man and hero with curls, as well as various deities) well known from “official” art and religion, both precludes their characterization as objects of conspicuous consumption or prestigious display *and* challenges their classification as an exclusively popular art form.²² Their recovery from both official and domestic contexts insinuates, as Pollock observed in regard to the similarly distributed Early Dynastic and Old Akkadian clay figurines, that “they carried a degree of ‘official’ meaning – part of a public transcript [an ideological discourse formulated and presented by a dominant group to subordinate ones] that was [perhaps] connected to temple ritual – while at the same time

²² The noncanonical nature of the plaques’ visual compositions was explored particularly in Assante 2002: some of the figures rendered on the plaques are, however, common in official and elite art forms.



Figure 2: Old Babylonian Period Fired Clay Plaque (ca. 2000-1600 BCE); Nude Hero With Curls Holding a Flowing Vase; 13.4 (h) x 8.1 (w) cm (BM 116813). © Trustees of the British Museum.

bearing quite different connotations when part of hidden transcripts [located within the potentially subversive internal discourse of subordinate groups]” (Pollock 2011: 146, 132; see also Scott 1990). This type of art is rarely captioned or inscribed so that individual figural types must be identified through painstaking correlation to known renderings from official art or to descriptions gleaned from textual sources. While the functionally literate and even scholars and temple or palace officials might be numbered among their audience, then, such artworks communicated their messages and fulfilled their fundamental purposes through their imagery, some stereotyped or highly conventionalized, even to or among the fully illiterate. On those plaques on which writing did play a prominent role alongside visual representations, as, for example, on the mid-second to mid-first millennium BCE corpus of Lamashtu amulets, text (typically on one side) and image (on the other) concurred in their overall message, conniving at the expulsion of Lamashtu, the “baby-snatching demon-goddess” (Figure 4). The one, however, was no mere illustration or description of the other: while writing, often an incantation against Lamashtu’s attentions or a recounting of her names and powers, may have enhanced the magical efficacy of the amulets, the visual representation of the demon-goddess typically depicted her successful diversion or expulsion. On some of the lower quality and likely more inexpensive amulets, pseudo-writing (comprising a collection of incoherent signs) or magical triangles sufficed to take the place of any actual incantation against her.

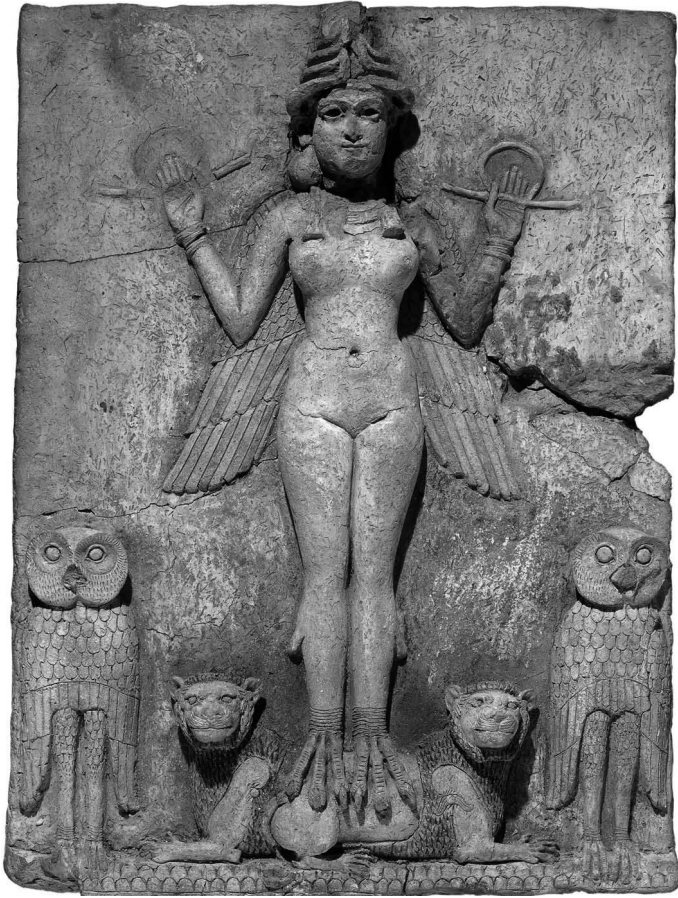


Figure 3: Old Babylonian Period Fired Clay Plaque (ca. 2000-1600 BCE); Queen of the Night Plaque (Formerly the Burney Relief); 49.5 (h) x 37 (w) cm (British Museum, registration no. ME 2003-7-18,1). © Trustees of the British Museum.

Similarly miniature in scale, and occupying the space between official and popular (or perhaps more properly, personal) art, cylinder seals represent one of the most characteristic of Mesopotamian art forms.²³ Made from a range of materials, from clay

²³ Frequently mass-produced (as the Old Babylonian terracotta plaques) or possessing a dual identity (as cylinder seals, comprising both object – the seal itself – and product – the sealing), the status of these diminutive Near Eastern objects as true “works of art” is regarded with some suspicion by scholars in other disciplines. Given the general acceptance of miniature and functional objects such as Japanese *netsuke* and print media such as European woodcuts as art, however, the place of miniature and even mass-produced Near Eastern plaques, figurines, and cylinder seals within the canon of art should arguably be an uncontroversial one, bolstered in the case of the cylinder seals by their

and faience to rare and semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli and carnelian,²⁴ the seals were cut with intaglio patterns or scenic compositions that yielded a continuous if miniature frieze when rolled out onto wet clay (Figure 5). Over the course of their existence, the seals were variously used, representing symbols of a particular office or individual, signaling ownership, protecting or asserting the legitimacy of that which they marked or sealed, worn as amulets or personal ornaments, and perhaps also rolled out for decorative purposes as on the rims or shoulders of storage jars. The earliest seals, some too large to be easily worn or carried, may have been linked solely with their administrative purposes. Typically perforated by the Jemdet Nasr Period (ca. 3100–2900 BCE), however, and increasingly associated with individuals rather than offices, cylinder seals by the Early Dynastic Period likely carried something of the apotropaic properties of the earlier stamp seals and are well worth considering in the context of distributed personhood or distributed agency.²⁵ Seals themselves, as writing, gained a substantially broader currency with increasing literacy in the late third and early second millennium, so that ownership became relatively widespread and even slaves are recorded as possessing them,²⁶ while the developing use of faience or frit (properly sintered quartz) – an easily cut, fired, and glazed material – in mid-second millennium Mitanni and first millennium BCE Assyria enabled the mass-production of brightly colored and widely disseminated, though not particularly durable, seals.²⁷

In regard to their place on the spectrum between official and private art, it is notable that even while cylinder seals expanded in function and came to develop a more intimate association with the individual, and even while a single individual might come to possess several different seals for use (presumably) in a range of different contexts,²⁸ many of these miniature artworks continued to reflect “political agendas and state purpose” (Winter 2001: 8) and bore standardized figures or visual conventions arguably circulated through pattern-books or easily worked out “from patterns provided by the collections of existing stones or impressions of them, modified as required” (Moorey 1999: 104; and see above). It is significant, moreover, that

ornamental uses both direct, as through their wearing as jewelry, and indirect, as through their rolling out to leave friezes on wet clay (sealings).

24 While semi-precious stones and materials may have been primarily under elite control, they are unlikely to have remained *exclusively* so. For the dynamic nature of prestige goods, see Stein 2001: 363–70; Potts 2007: 130–31.

25 See Winter 2007: 49–50; 2000: 58–60. For partible or distributed personhood and the relationship between primary and secondary agents, see Strathern 1988: 185–224; Gell 1998: 20–21, 96–154; and Porter, this volume.

26 For the expanding ownership of cylinder seals, see Collon 2007: 95; 1987: 105.

27 For the composition and use of “faience” cylinder seals and the consequences for elite and royal patrons of their adoption, see Collon 1987: 61–65; Moorey 1999: 181–82, 186–87.

28 For the relationship between personal identity and the motifs represented on cylinder seals, see Winter 2000: 136–37.



Figure 4: Neo-Assyrian Period Stone Lamashtu Amulet (ca. 800–600 BCE) with Image of Lamashtu on Obverse and Inscription on Reverse; 12.7 (h) x 6.35 (w) cm (BM 117759). © Trustees of the British Museum.

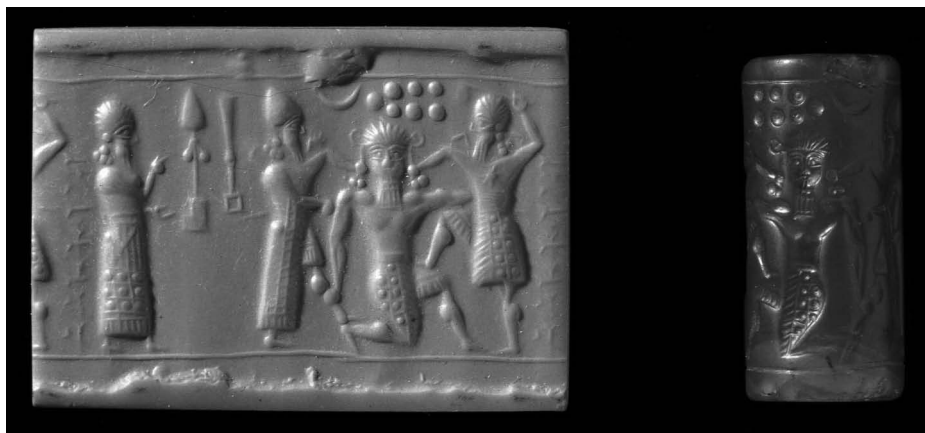


Figure 5: Neo-Assyrian Period Carnelian Seal (ca. late 8th century BCE); Gilgamesh and Enkidu Slaying the Monster Huwawa/Humbaba; 2.8 (h) x 1.3 (d) cm (BM 89763). © Trustees of the British Museum.

although inscriptions giving such information as the name and sometimes the ancestry or office of the owner began to be incorporated into cylinder seal compositions from as early as the Jemdet Nasr Period (c. 3100–2900 BCE), these were likely cut *not* by the illiterate or only functionally literate (even if first-rate) seal-cutter but rather by specially trained scribes (Collon 1987: 103).²⁹ Cylinder seals may have emerged alongside writing in service of the increasingly complex administrative needs of the developing urban polities (Pittman 1994), scribe and seal-cutter may sometimes have worked side by side, and text and image might sometimes converge or even reinforce each other as “double articulation[s] of identity: imagery plus specifics of personal data” (Winter 2000: 82). The interface between visual art and writing, however, was never a simple or directly equivalent one – whether in the context of production or of reception or consumption.

Official art works and monuments, for their part, included stone stelae, large and even small scale stone or metal statuary, and alabaster wall reliefs, in addition to elite or votive objects such as stone or metal vases, plaques, and sculpture. Stelae are known from throughout Mesopotamian history while other of these art forms came into or went out of fashion in certain periods. Significantly, many of these artworks incorporate both writing and images into their compositions already from the latter part of the Early Dynastic Period, suggesting their capacity to interact with a scholarly or highly literate audience as well as an illiterate one. More significantly, the interface or interaction between text and image on any single official monument or artwork, as on the popular art discussed above, is rarely a simply reflective or illustrative one.

²⁹ Seal inscriptions were not only tiny but also had to be cut in reverse so as to be legible when rolled out onto clay.

Writing and visual representation often diverge in the types of information they convey, the level (and the focus) of their details, and even their intended function and audience.

Text might be deployed in some cases, as on the limestone Early Dynastic III Plaque of Ur-Nanshe (ca. 2550–2500 BCE), to caption or label important figures such as kings or royal family members or key officials, or, as on the Early Dynastic Period Stele of the Vultures (ca. 2450 BCE), to provide legal or historical justification as well as divine support or approval for a course of action or an event such as the waging of a war or the construction of a temple (Winter 1985). It may also function, as in the case of statue inscriptions, to define “in no uncertain terms the specific historical identification of the referent behind the image,” particularly pertinent in ensuring the correct association of idealized royal portraits with the kings they represented and yet did not physically resemble (Winter 1997: 91 n. 57).³⁰ On elite or luxury art intended for public display or conspicuous consumption, the addition of writing may have served to reinforce the status of such objects and to underscore their specific creation for or circulation within the somewhat rarefied sphere in which their inscriptions might be *fully* understood. Writing, moreover, might well have enhanced or ensured the efficacy of some artworks. A votive or dedicatory item, for example, could be inscribed with the names of the dedicant and the god for whom the object was intended, as well as a prayer detailing how it was intended to function.³¹ Apotropaic items such as amulets, for their part, could be inscribed with incantations against the inimical figure or force that they were intended to ward off or to avert.

Whilst such inscriptions might generally illuminate the imagery alongside which they appear – as on the chlorite vase bearing images of serpents and serpent-hybrids and dedicated by the Lagash II Dynasty ruler Gudea (ca. 2150–2125 BCE) to the god Ningishzida, a netherworld god associated with the horned serpent (RIME 3/1: no. 66, 158; Suter 2000: 325, 49–50) – there might just as well be no apparent relation between the two at all. On cylinder seals, where the images were typically cut first, leaving space for further personalization through the addition of an inscription (Röllig 1993: 458), text and image might be (or seem) utterly unrelated, so that even the

³⁰ For the term “portrait” in the context of the ancient Near East, especially in regards to the images (*šalmu*) of the kings, see Bahrani 2003: 123–48; Winter 1989, 1996, 2009: 266–67. For the name (here inscribed) as a significant locus of identity alongside the body, see Radner 2005; Westenholz 2012: 92; Woods 2012: 42.

³¹ Writing might be incorporated harmoniously into the overall composition, as on the Early Dynastic Period Entemena (Enmetana) Vase, where the inscription is graven on the neck of the vessel while the imagery is limited to the shoulder and body of the vessel (Frankfort 1996: 66–68 fig. 70), or as on the Stele of the Vultures, where the inscription occupies the negative space left by the images in relief (Winter 1985). It might alternatively be added as a foreseen but independent action, as on cylinder seals where space is left for a personalized inscription, or as a type of explanatory gloss to incorporate foreign imagery into the Mesopotamian worldview, as on the famous Inana and the Serpent Vase (see Hansen and Dales 1962: 75–84; Pittman 2002: 211–13).

god(s) visually represented in a scene and the god(s) referenced in the inscription may not correspond.

Text on official as well as elite art could thus serve any or all of a multiplicity of functions: it might respectively lend an image a clear measure of historical specificity and a detailed historical context; ensure the perpetuity or fame of the king both in the memory of future generations and in the memory of a god/dess; assure the perpetual expression of the prayer or wish expressed within the inscription; function to transform the private act of dedication to the divine into a significant display of royal power and responsibility, emphasizing the king's fulfillment of his obligations to the gods (Thomason 2005: 82–83); serve itself as a public display of prestige or authority, even where it was unlikely to be actually read in any detail;³² or function in general terms to illuminate or gloss the associated imagery.

Images on official artworks and monuments, then, were frequently capable of standing alone, of effectively communicating their messages and content even apart from any associated inscriptions, and of being comprehensible (at some level) in their own right as self-contained and highly coded content even by an illiterate or only functionally literate audience utterly lacking in scribal or scholarly knowledge. What precisely, however, were the *modes* through which images conveyed content in the ancient Near East? And, more specifically, what were the modes of mythological representation in the various types of art ranging on the spectrum from official to popular or personal?

Pictorial Narrative and Icon: Imag(in)ing Mythology in Mesopotamia

The mode by which Near Eastern art conveyed narrative content in particular was described already in 1955 as being primarily allusive or referential rather than explicit in nature, corresponding to Wickhoff's "isolating" mode of representation.³³ The implications of this for the visual representation of narrative, and for our understanding of

³² Inscriptions appearing on the Neo-Assyrian *lamassu* and, in some cases, cut over the figures depicted on the alabaster relief panels convey the power of the king through "a highly condensed formulation of the titles and activities of the king, including the king's name and ancestry, royal epithets expressing piety, valor, and military strength" (Winter 1981: 18). While the attempt to read these would be hampered by the medium on which the inscriptions were cut, the display of the inscription itself (allowing further for recognition of its standardized content for the initiated) arguably contributed to the potency or efficacy of the images and the authority or power they conveyed.

³³ Perkins 1957: 55; Wickhoff 1900: 8–14; Lewis 2006: 88. Wickhoff's modes, notably, were revised in Weitzmann 1947 as (1) simultaneous; (2) monoscenic; and (3) cyclic. On Wickhoff and Weitzmann's narrative modes and Assyrian art, see also, Watanabe in this volume.

such, are significant: while a given story or event might be visually referenced through the depiction of its culminating moment or, alternately, of several of its key moments grouped together,³⁴ a larger narrative arc could rarely be “read” within – or reconstructed from – a pictorial composition alone. A viewer’s full comprehension of any particular image, and of its specific functioning in the context in which it was rendered, thus demanded a thorough prior knowledge of its social, cultural, historical, or narrative referents. This is not to say that “autonomous narrative,” comprehensible independently of any external (particularly verbal or written) composition, was nonexistent in the Near East. Artworks in which a narrative sequence may be “read” indeed appear already with the peaceful and harmonious imagery of the late fourth millennium BCE Warka Vase, while images of battle arranged in narrative format are known from the Early Dynastic Period Stele of the Vultures, the historical side of which presented events both in synchronic and diachronic sequence (Winter 1985: 20–21). By the first millennium BCE, historical narrative – and especially (though not exclusively) battle narrative – as structured and stand-alone visual storytelling was flourishing in the context of the Neo-Assyrian royal palace orthostat reliefs, which narrated historical events through the images themselves in addition to being accompanied by detailed written inscriptions (Winter 1981).³⁵

Battle scenes aside, however, instances in which narrative – and mythological narrative in particular – was “carried through the imagery itself are rare, reflecting a situation fundamentally different from that found subsequently in the West and often from that found in the further East as well” (Winter 1985: 11). The interpretation of mythological imagery is further obstructed by the fact that Mesopotamia, while rich in narrative of every type, did not support the sort of “monolithic religious/mythological/heroic texts [that] stand behind the very fabric of society as the Bible does for the Judeo-Christian West, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* for the classical world, or the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* for the Indian subcontinent” (Winter 1985: 11). The narratives relating to Gilgamesh, an ancient king of Uruk, arguably come closest to this type of text for the Near East. While fragmentary written references to him are extant already from the Ur III Period, however, and while the various narratives recounting his heroic exploits were re-told and re-imagined down the millennia not only in the Mesopotamian heartland but also in neighboring regions, even images reliably correlated with episodes from this narrative cycle remain rare. Given this state of affairs, how might we account for those numerous visual compositions that yet appear mythological in nature, involving as they do all manner of fantastic monstrous, heroic, and divine figures and rendered in both the official and “popular” arts, and how might we now understand what these were originally intended to convey?

34 Characterized as the “episodic method” in Perkins 1957: 56, this may be generally correlated with Wickhoff’s complementary mode of narrative representation.

35 Historical accuracy, however, was not a prerequisite for historical narrative representation: the Assyrian army is, notably, never depicted in defeat.

The inhabitants of Mesopotamia, I would suggest, *universalized* their numerous and varied mythologies, both oral and written, through two primary pictorial strategies, the first being the circulation and replication of certain figural stereotypes – whether through the imitation of old or venerable images (as in official and monumental art), through the use of sketch- or pattern-books (as in the design perhaps of cylinder seal compositions), or through the mass production of certain types of artwork (as the terracotta plaques) – and the second being the deliberate visual representation of even complex mythological scenes or episodes in iconic form.³⁶ In both cases, the pictorial strategy employed yielded a conventionalized composition capable of circulating independently of any single or immutable signification, allowing for its flexible deployment and investment with meaning by those representing it and its interpretation on multiple levels by a diverse audience of heterogeneous cultural knowledge and experience.³⁷

The Polysemic Image: Visual Literacy and “Evocative” Mythological Representations

One of the key types of conventionalized image for mythological representation is the contest scene (Figure 6), an action scene with narrative elements involving one or more contending pairs of anthropomorphic, theriomorphic, and therianthropic combatants. Attaining its most familiar and enduring form in the glyptic art of the early third millennium BCE, when older images of vulnerable or domesticated animals being attacked by wild or predatory ones gained a new vertical orientation, the bipedal stance of the combatants, which now balanced on their hind- or, occasionally, fore-legs, signaled the location of the scenes on a mythical rather than natural plane.³⁸ This new version of the contest scene rapidly became one of the most commonly rendered images in the glyptic iconography of the Early Dynastic Period and remained popular in the subsequent Old Akkadian (a period significant for its range and variety of mythological imagery) and post-Akkadian periods (Boehmer

³⁶ Icon here refers to the conveying of an overarching abstract concept, a type of summary or symbolic referent (see Winter 1985: 16).

³⁷ The role of cultural knowledge in the reception of an image or a visual program was addressed already in Winter’s close analysis of the throneroom of Assurnasirpal II, in which she discussed “the meaning of the various subjects in the visual program manifested in the orthostat reliefs lining the walls in conjunction with the “reading competence’ of the intended audience.” Prior knowledge may have ensured an “optimal level of reading” but some of the images were viable also on a minimal level (Winter 1983: 27).

³⁸ The older images from which the mythological contest scene develops arguably include scenes of animal predation, hunting, and the master of animals.

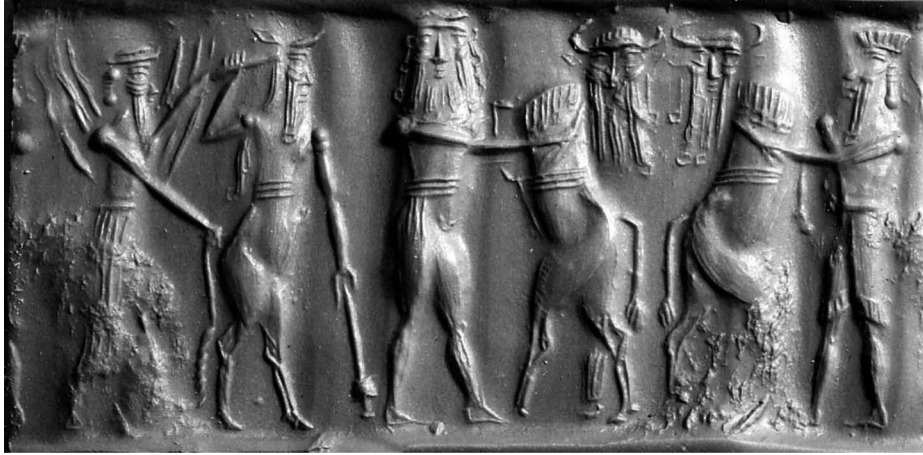


Figure 6: Old Akkadian Period Black Serpentine Cylinder Seal (ca. 2300 BCE); Contest Scene: Three Groups of Combatants. Left to Right: (1) God with Rays and Bull-Man; (2) Nude Hero with Curls Grasps Human-Headed Bull; (3) Human-Headed Bull Grasped by Nude Hero. 3.8 (h) x 2.5 (d) cm (BM 89765). © Trustees of the British Museum.

1965; Amiet 1980). Moreover, it continued to be represented in a range of iterations and media (both monumental and miniature) throughout the subsequent two millennia, in later periods comprising especially combat between a heroic anthropomorphic figure, typically a king or a god, and one or more wild, exotic, or monstrous creatures.

While the full meaning of the contest scene cannot be easily encapsulated or articulated, unsurprising given its function as a flexible signifier and so as an ideal vehicle for mythological representation, the image as an icon reflects the central and overarching conflict that defines the Mesopotamian cosmos and worldview, this comprising the eternal struggle between order and chaos, between the civilized world as it is organized and protected both by the gods and by the king, and the dangerous wilderness beyond the city walls.³⁹ This struggle is recorded and repeated in numerous of the extant Sumerian and Akkadian mythological narratives from Mesopotamia as one hero-god after another takes on one monstrous would-be usurper after another, the god ultimately prevailing and securing the ordered world for another day. The contest scene, in other words, is an icon of (specifically) Mesopotamian civilization, so successful as a signifier and so deeply embedded in the cultural experience and accessible to the inhabitants of this region that it continued to be represented from its inception during the rise of the first cities through to the fall of the Neo-Assyrian and

³⁹ Hansen 1998: 50; Sonik, forthcoming a. The frequent representation of the contest scene on the cylinder seals is very much in keeping with this interpretation as the resulting frieze when the seal is rolled out is potentially endless, underscoring the eternal nature of the conflict depicted.



Figure 7: Alabaster Relief Panel from the Temple of Ninurta at Nimrud (ca. 865 BCE); Ninurta and Azag (?) in Combat; 2.4 (h) x 3.6 (w) m (BM 124572). © Trustees of the British Museum.

Neo-Babylonian Empires – and beyond. In some cases, too, it might be individualized by the artist undertaking the design or making of the image, or by the patron commissioning it, so that hero and challenger assumed a specific guise. The hero-god Ninurta, for example, and his monstrous lion-eagle opponent (Azag?) appear locked in single combat in a monumental composition from the Temple of Ninurta (ca. 865 BCE) at the Assyrian city of Nimrud (Figure 7).⁴⁰ For those possessed of the cultural knowledge to recognize the specific attributes with which individual combatants were depicted, any of a wide range of associations could be evoked: Ninurta, for example, appears in diverse written sources as a famous monster wrangler, a hero-god extraordinaire, and also as a model of human kingship.⁴¹ For the less exalted viewer, one

⁴⁰ This rare (surviving) monumental representation of a mythological scene has been tentatively identified as an image of Ninurta battling either Azag (Asakku) or Anzud, see Black and Green 1992: 143.

⁴¹ The gods' monster slaying was echoed in the natural world by the kings' lion and wild bull hunts, see Watanabe 1998, 2000. Both actions functioned to hold chaos and wilderness at bay, and to ensure the protection and maintenance of order and civilization in the divine sphere and in the mortal realm respectively.

who had no familiarity with scribal lore but who yet recognized the image of the god, it is possible that Ninurta played similar roles in oral mythology, or that his image evoked a range of other associations. At the last, for the near visually illiterate, one who did not recognize the individual combatants represented even where they had been individualized, the icon itself may yet have been a sufficiently familiar visual convention that its fundamental signification, representing the eternal struggle between civilization and encroaching disorder that defined the Mesopotamian world-view, was successfully conveyed.⁴²

If the contest scene was one of the most popular vehicles for (visual) mythological expression, there certainly existed other conventions through which mythological or narrative associations or correlations might be evoked without the representation of detailed narrative scenes. A famous example is the so-called Seal of Marduk, a large 19-centimeter long lapis lazuli seal from early first millennium BCE Babylon.⁴³ Depicting Marduk holding the rod and ring, with his conquered and now docile monster (the *mušhuššu*, “furious snake” or snake-dragon) sprawled beside his feet, the seal shows both god and monster atop a base articulated with a series of parallel, narrowly set, undulating lines – the standard representation of water in Mesopotamia. While there is no *apparent* action in this scene, nor any aspect of autonomous narrative, the specific composition and the elements included here are sufficient to *evoke*, provided the viewer possessed the appropriate cultural knowledge, the god Marduk’s victory over chaos generally, much in the mode of the monster-slaying Ninurta, and over the sea (Tiamat) and her eleven monster children (including the *mušhuššu*) specifically – a victory that in the Akkadian narrative *Enuma elish* was the basis for Marduk’s ascension to the kingship of the gods. The signification here is not necessarily so straightforward: *Enuma elish* also attributes Marduk with the act of letting flow the Tigris and the Euphrates, the two life-sustaining watercourses of Mesopotamia, from Tiamat’s eyes, and it is by no means impossible that the water beneath the god’s feet should be read as underlining his own generative or creative abilities or connotations. And all nuance aside, even the most ignorant viewer might look at the imagery on the seal and recognize Marduk as an authoritative and civilized deity by his wearing of the horned helmet and holding of the rod and the ring

⁴² Even the famous images of Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying Huwawa/Humbaba (Lambert 1987), the monstrous guardian of the Cedar Forest, may be assigned broadly to this type. I would locate, despite the reservations expressed in Winter 2000: 54–60, the so-called Neo-Assyrian royal seal also within this type.

⁴³ Dedicated by the Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-shumi, the seal was certainly commissioned by and intended for use within a context in which familiarity with *Enuma elish* and with all of the god Marduk’s other associations would be well known and understood. For a drawing of the seal, see Oshima 2007: fig. 24.1. The image of a god standing with one or both feet on a natural animal or monster, or with such a creature docile at his feet, should be regarded as an image of mastery (see Sonik, forthcoming b).

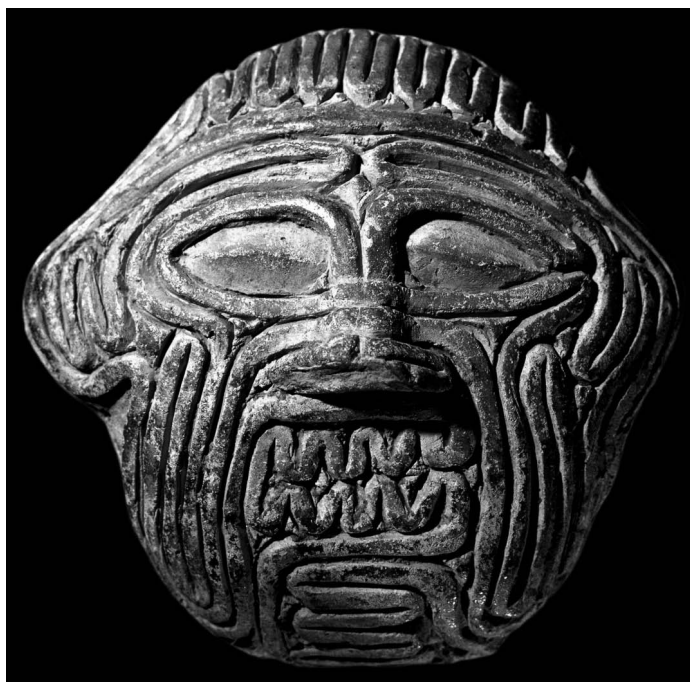


Figure 8: Old Babylonian Period Fired Clay Plaque (ca. 1800-1600 BCE); Inscribed Huwawa Head with Modeled Entrails Delineating Features; 8.4 (h) x 8.4 (w) cm (BM 116624). © Trustees of the British Museum.

(Slanski 2007), and his defeat or mastery of the chaotic wilderness, here signified by the monstrous snake-dragon lying quiescently at his feet.⁴⁴

As a final example, it is worth noting that at least some of those divine and monstrous figures who appear on the mass-produced Old Babylonian terracotta plaques, a so-called “popular art” form (as discussed above), are also prominent denizens of official visual art and written narrative. Among these are major gods and goddesses such as Ninhursag, Adad, and Ishtar, as well as monsters such as the bull-man, the nude hero with curls, the griffin, and Huwawa/Humbaba (Moorey 1975: 88–90; 2005; Auerbach 1994: 57–69; Assante 2002: 8–9). The renderings of such figures on the plaques resemble more portraits than narrative scenes:⁴⁵ individuals are

⁴⁴ The alterity of the monsters, their identity as “Other,” was not only inscribed in their bodies but also signaled by their geographical exile and social alienation (see Sonik, forthcoming c).

⁴⁵ The term portrait is here used to signify the non-narrative nature of these representations, which represent more icons or studies of individual figures. Some few narrative mythological compositions are known from the plaque corpus, among these two that might be linked to the contest scene composition: (1) the famous image of the god battling the solar-headed cyclop from Khafajeh (improbably linked to Marduk and Tiamat in *Enuma elish* in Yadin 1971; Grafman 1972; Kaplan 1976), see image

frequently depicted in isolation and/or engaged in generic action, as holding a gatepost, rather than with any particular attribute or within any larger composition suggesting a specific narrative context or episode. It is possible that the figures alone are sufficient to *evoke* a range of cultural information or contexts – including any existing narrative correlations and/or ritual or religious functions with which an image might be imbued or *invested* both by the artist who produced it as well as by the audience designated (or actually happening) to view or consume it. At the last, the Huwawa/Humbaba head terracotta plaque type (Figure 8), akin to the Greek Gorgoneion, represents a unique case in potentially functioning as a “condensed reference” or allusion to a known narrative event (Assante 2002: 9), namely, Huwawa’s slaying and decapitation at the hands of the hero Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu (Figure 5) and the subsequent functioning of the monster’s head as an apotropaion. The extent to which the signification latent in the image was *actually* activated upon visual contact with its audience, however, would depend upon each individual viewer’s pre-existing cultural knowledge and capacity to correctly interpret the various visual conventions or stereotypes employed in the representation and its context.

Conclusion

Some number of singular and apparently non-formulaic or non-iconic mythological compositions certainly exist as part of the extant corpus of Mesopotamian art, perhaps innovated by artists or artisans – these drawing either on written or oral compositions now lost to us or even on *versions* of known narrative episodes rendered unrecognizable by divergent details – or commissioned by individual patrons to suit specific personal associations or inclinations.⁴⁶ It is primarily through the conventionalized representational strategies discussed above, however, that the rich, complex, and diverse mythological content of Mesopotamia was universalized in order that it might be effectively visually conveyed – and thereby, on some level at least, broadly understood by the original inhabitants of the ancient Near East and, ultimately, by the modern viewer as well.

in Frankfort 1996: 113 and recent discussion in George 2012; and (2) the rendering of anthropomorphic figures engaging with monsters and ostriches (K.824) appearing in Moorey 1975: 90, XVII, pl. XXIVa.

46 Identified mythological episodes (unique or conventionalized) were catalogued in several useful articles, these including bibliographies current to the date of their publication, see Green 1997a; also Green 1997b, 1995. An unusual non-combat mythological scene from the Old Babylonian terracotta plaques, apparently representing a bearded male in a structure embracing a stylized tree with a head and crown, is cited in Auerbach 1994: 69, no. 267, pl. 60b. A number of striking and well-published mythological compositions are also known especially from the Old Akkadian glyptic repertoire, see Boehmer 1965; Amiet 1980; Steinkeller 1992; Nadali and Verderame 2008.

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Jennifer C. Ross

Art's Role in the Origins of Writing: The Seal-Carver, the Scribe, and the Earliest Lexical Texts

Abstract: The earliest Mesopotamian lexical lists, from the Late Uruk period (c. 3350–3000 BCE), are vocabularies, precursors to later lists of material culture items and professional titles, which played a central role in the education of scribes in the second and first millennia. But whether they could have served a similar role at this earliest stage of writing has generally gone unquestioned. This chapter examines the earliest vocabularies in terms of two contemporary and complementary spheres: writing and art. The signs in the lexical texts are specifically to be found in an art form that had already long been in existence, that of seal iconography. Until the Late Uruk period, seals were the main technology of communication, used throughout the Near East in affirming identities and verifying transactions. Before these functions could be replaced by writing, the communicative power of seal iconography had to be captured and redirected. The first step was for scribes, perhaps former seal-carvers themselves, to categorize and rank the motifs used, and then elaborate on them; the end result of this process was the lexical lists. The people, animals, and objects that populated the glyptic repertoire of the Uruk period reappeared newly reclassified in the major Uruk lists – Lu (“Person”), Vessels, Metals, Animals, and the rest.

Keywords: practice theory, technological change, writing, lexuality, urbanism

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Introduction

In the busy streets of late fourth millennium BCE Uruk, the rapidly expanding urban experience provided ample opportunities for economic, bureaucratic, and social encounters. Among these were contacts and collaborations among specialists in communication, people who took a leading role in developing and manipulating techniques to signal information of various sorts, from occupation and social identity to the content of individual transactions. Cuneiform writing emerged from the melting pot of urban Uruk and spread to other towns and cities where similar needs were developing.

The past three decades have seen significant advances in understanding the development of writing at Uruk, particularly in the reconstruction of administrative

processes that required and sustained written documentation (Englund 1998; Cooper 2004; Woods 2010).¹ The administrative texts from Uruk point to the complexity of interactions in the city, particularly in the Eanna precinct, as they document a variety of book-keeping operations, including land and labor registration, animal and produce accounting, and the cataloging of a wide variety of finished products (Nissen *et al.* 1993). Beyond the thousands of administrative texts, another 15% of the tablets from Uruk and contemporary sites are distinguished by particular features and content as “lexical lists.” Lexical texts have long been of interest to Assyriologists for their role in scribal training of the third to first millennia BCE, and for their collection of linguistic, literary, and specialist knowledge, all central to the decipherment of cuneiform and to modern scholarly understanding of Mesopotamian expertise in fields such as medicine and astronomy.²

The earliest lexical lists belong to the paleographic stages of Uruk IV (3350–3200 BCE) and III (3200–3000 BCE), the same dates as the first pictographic administrative tablets. They are vocabularies, precursors to first millennium *ur₅-ra=hubullu* and *Lu*, bilingual lists of (mostly) material items and professions, respectively. At this earliest stage of writing, their very existence gives rise to some intriguing conundrums: Was there already a need for scribal education for which these texts were composed? Did the lists include signs also employed in administrative texts (that is, were these “practical” lists)? And from where, at this earliest stage of writing, did the signs come?

In this chapter, I contextualize the development of early lists within the social environment of urban Uruk, where a number of occupational specialists, including those versed in writing and in artistic production, were in regular contact. The Uruk lexical texts comprise signs drawn from a particular art form that had already long been in existence, that of seal iconography. The first scribes did not attempt to render the particular items represented in the glyptic repertoire; rather, the glyptic motifs inspired the creation of categories of signs, culminating in the specific vocabulary lists. The signs and general topics covered in the lexical lists come from a system of classification of glyptic imagery, suggesting that at least one group of early scribes had a background in seal-carving.

Piotr Michalowski (1994) cautions against thinking that there were “precursors” to writing or a straightforward evolution of communication technologies. Rather, various contemporary communication systems were in use in the centuries

1 The study of the Uruk texts was spearheaded by a group of scholars from the Freie Universität Berlin and the Max Planck Institute: Hans Nissen, Margaret Green, Peter Damerow, and Robert Englund. While study of these tablets is still in progress, the majority has been published in the series *Archaische Texte aus Uruk (ATU)* and *Materialien zu den frühen Schriftzeugnissen des Vorderen Orients (MSVO)*. These tablets, and unpublished late fourth millennium documents, are available on the website of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI; www.cdli.ucla.edu).

2 Lexical lists have been published in the series *Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon (MSL)*.

preceding the invention of writing, some of which had productive afterlives in the cuneiform writing system. To tease through the possible interactions of these systems requires attention to their physical properties, their technological requirements, and the social and economic contexts of their use. As Late Uruk period urban society rapidly evolved and expanded, bureaucrats and scribes remolded and transformed the previously existing systems to suit new needs. At the same time, the dynamic context of the administrative center at Uruk allowed for, and even required, a high degree of creative thought in order to supply new means of interaction and communication. In the following sections, I will trace two major lines of development: of lexical texts and of seal use. Then I will bring these two threads together to demonstrate the interwoven texture of the processes that led to writing.

My approach in this chapter grows out of archaeological and anthropological studies of technology that apply “practice theory,” a concept itself derived from Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* and Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Giddens 1979, 1984; Dobres 2000). These methods of analysis focus on the dynamic interplay of human (individual and group) motivations and agency and the overarching structure – the rules and environments (physical, social and political) that constrain them. One application of practice theory views technology as socially-motivated action on materials; makers of objects draw on prior knowledge, abilities, and capacity to act with each creative performance. In examining situations of technological change, of which Late Uruk-period Uruk is a leading example, one must take into account the interaction of multiple components: pre-existing experience, chains of social networks and strategies, and the ways in which the urban setting may have both fostered and hindered technological production.

A note on stratigraphy and chronology is in order before I begin to trace the developments that led to writing (see Fig. 1). “Archaic” (that is, Late Uruk period) tablets have been found in the two early cultic areas in the middle of Uruk: the White Temple of the sky god Anu to the west, and the more sprawling Eanna precinct, dedicated to the goddess Inanna, to the east. While the tablets from the Anu temple are unusual, made from gypsum plaster rather than clay, their numbers (24) are insignificant compared to the nearly 5000 tablets from Eanna. The excavators at Eanna paid close attention to the architectural development of the building complex, dividing it into two main phases (Eanna IV and III), but the stratigraphic situation is made more difficult because the tablets at Uruk were written, used, discarded, and then reused in construction projects; very few of the Archaic texts at Uruk were found *in situ* (Englund 1998: 34–41). Only seven tablets derive from a primary context: the final floor level (IVa) of Temple C, before the complex was entirely remodeled in Level III (Nissen 1987). The rest come from various building phases within Eanna IV and III, but only rarely can they be dated based on context.

Calendar years BCE	Period	Communication technology	Paleographic stage	Archaeological context
8000-3500	Neolithic, Chalcolithic (Ubaid), Early Uruk	tokens, stamp seals		entire Near East
3500-3350	Middle Uruk	tokens, bullae, stamp and cylinder seals	"Pre-Writing"	Syria (Habuba Kabira, Tell Brak, Chagar Bazar, Tell Qraya), Iran (Susa, Chogha Mish, Shahdad, Tepe Yahya, Farukhabad), Mesopotamia (Uruk, Nineveh)
3350-3200	early Late Uruk	numerical tablets, numero-ideographic tablets, stamp and cylinder seals	Uruk V and IV	Mesopotamia (Uruk [Anu temple, Eanna V-IV], Nineveh, Khafaje), Iran (Susa [Acropolis 18-17], Tepe Sialk, Chogha Mish, Godin Tepe, Tall-i Ghazir), Syria (Habuba Kabira, Jebel Aruda, Tell Brak)
		pictographic tablets	Uruk IV	Mesopotamia (Uruk [Eanna IV])
3200-3000	later Late Uruk/Jemdet Nasr	pictographic tablets, stamp and cylinder seals	Uruk III	Mesopotamia (Uruk [Eanna III], Jemdet Nasr, Umma, Tell Uqair, Kish, Larsa?, Eshnunna, Nippur)

Figure 1: Chronological chart.

In the absence of stratigraphic data, scholars have developed a paleographic schema, dividing the Archaic tablets with pictographic signs from Uruk into two phases, (unfortunately) also referred to as “Uruk IV” and “Uruk III,” on stylistic and technological grounds. Placement of individual tablets into one of these two phases is determined by whether sign forms are rounder and incised (earlier) or straighter and impressed (later). This paleographic distinction was described and explained in the first extensive publication of the tablets from Uruk (Falkenstein 1936). Despite a scarcity of stratigraphic correlations, the distinction appears to have chronological validity. “Uruk IV” tablets, those with the earlier sign forms, come only from the site of Uruk. They are typically dated to the early part of the Late Uruk period, c. 3350–3200 BCE. “Uruk III” tablets, dating 3200–3000 BCE, the end of the Late Uruk period, derive from Uruk and a number of other sites in southern Mesopotamia, including Jemdet Nasr, Tell Uqair, Umma, Kish, Nippur, Ur, Tell Asmar, and possibly Larsa (Englund 1998: 24–32).³ This geographic and temporal distribution indicates that writing was invented at Uruk, and later spread to other cities; Uruk is also the source of much larger numbers of tablets than the other sites.

Another set of tablets, with only numeric signs (and therefore not included among tablets with early “writing”), also derives from Uruk and contemporary sites in Syria

³ A number of Archaic tablets have been identified since Englund’s 1998 article, many of them held in private collections; these are accessible on the CDLI website.

and Iran, and has been assigned by scholars to the writing stage “Uruk V.” Paleographically, these “numerical tablets” appear to be earlier than those with pictographs, and CDLI assigns them to a date range of 3500–3350 BCE. But at least some of the Uruk V tablets were impressed by the same seals as found on Uruk IV texts, and they occur in contexts with later tablets, which means there was at least some overlap in the production of the two different types of documents. At Uruk and Susa, finally, a handful of “numero-ideographic” tablets combine one or two rudimentary signs with numbers and seal impressions (Englund 1998: 51–53). These are considered to belong to the very end of the Uruk V paleographic phase.

Lexical texts

Lexical lists were a major component of the educational system for Mesopotamian scribes of the second and first millennia BCE. Various types of lexical lists existed, including sign lists, thematically organized word lists (both monolingual and bilingual), and grammatical texts. Most of the preserved lexical lists from educational contexts in Mesopotamia are exercise tablets, extracts from the longer canonical lists, by means of which scribes-in-training learned sections of the longer texts or tested their memories and writing abilities. Some full-length texts also survive, written by master scribes, and presumably serving as references for both educational purposes and for working scribes.

At what point lexical texts began to be used in an educational setting, however, is a matter of some debate. Word lists are found as early as Uruk IV, distinguished by specific formal characteristics: each entry begins with the number sign N_1 , a single vertical stroke (“one”), and all the entries relate to a single subject. While Wagensonner (2007: 303; see also Englund 1998: 86) and others assert that the lexical lists of the Archaic period served in scribal training, Veldhuis (2010: 391) sees no evidence for a formal educational system in Mesopotamia until the Old Babylonian period, at which time the third millennium Sumerian texts were reorganized and repurposed to train scribes who spoke Akkadian but needed to use both languages. According to Veldhuis, the original lexical lists, originating in the Uruk period and copied faithfully by Early Dynastic Period (ED; early third millennium) scribes, were produced as reference works for the administrator-scribes, consisting of as complete a corpus of signs and words as they would need to generate administrative documents. The initial lexical lists, in this view, were created to transmit and elaborate on a new field of knowledge, but without the intention to provide a curriculum for its transmission (Veldhuis 1997: 1). Veldhuis (1997: 14; 2006: 189) also sees them as the result of intellectual exploration and elaboration of the new technology of writing.

Lexical texts were among the earliest written documents at Uruk, though in extremely small numbers compared with the administrative texts. Of the 1800 tablets

assigned to Uruk IV, only ten are lexical.⁴ By contrast, the numbers in each genre had grown significantly by Uruk III, as the writing system took hold. At Uruk, nearly 2500 Uruk III tablets are administrative, and another 650 (about 20%) lexical. Lexical texts are found among the documents at other Uruk III sites; two come from Jemdet Nasr (as compared to over 200 administrative texts), one from Nippur, and 17 probably came from Umma (compared to nearly 400 administrative texts). These early lexical tablets, even when preserved complete, do not contain the full canonical lists and had only a colophon on the reverse.⁵ Instead, each tablet contains an “extract” of a certain number of lines, usually in canonical order. By contrast, the ED versions of the Archaic lists, from a variety of locations, tend toward completeness, with columns of text on obverse and reverse, and written in a much more formal hand.

Several of the Uruk IV texts are from lexical series with long later histories. Five belong to Archaic Lu, the precursor to the Lu list of professions and titles, copied into the first millennium BCE. Two are lists of vessels, a text that becomes standardized as part of the canonical vocabulary list *ur₅-ra=hubullu* Tablet X (known as Vessels). Another Uruk IV list of metal objects developed into *ur₅-ra=hubullu* Tablets XI and XII (known as Metals). Two others are lists of words without distinct categories.

While the numbers and types of lexical tablets are small in Uruk IV, by Uruk III they had proliferated into a wider array of word lists. Lu, Vessels, and Metals grew in length in Uruk III, and their entries became standardized and set in a canonical order that was followed in the ED texts as well. Of the 125 lines of the reconstructed Uruk III Lu list, the Uruk IV tablets preserve just over 30 lines, largely in an abbreviated form; while most entries in the Uruk III Lu list contain two to three signs, the Uruk IV entries usually comprise a single sign per case. Additionally, some lines in Uruk IV Lu appear to have no Uruk III correlates. All of this indicates an early phase of text composition and compilation in Uruk IV, but one that produced rich results by Uruk III, when the Lu list was the most popular lexical text of the time, existing in 169 surviving copies from Uruk, with copies attested at Umma and elsewhere.⁶

The other Uruk IV lexical texts yield similar results, but with fewer individual tablets in each series, their correlation with the more canonical Uruk III versions is more tenuous. The two Uruk IV Vessels list copies (compared to 91 copies in Uruk III)

⁴ This number is elastic, as are others used throughout this article, because some tablets once assigned to Uruk IV have been joined with others with more developed sign forms, dating to Uruk III. At most, 11 lexical texts of Uruk IV date have been identified (Englund and Nissen 1993: 12).

⁵ An exception, W 20266,1 (ATU 3: pl. 2–3), inscribed with six columns of text on the obverse and a colophon on the poorly preserved reverse, would have had about 100 lines of Archaic Lu had its edges been preserved; only another 20 or so lines are attested in other contemporary versions of the list. More typical of fully preserved tablets are those that, like W 17942 (ATU 3: pl. 1), contain only up to 35 lines of Archaic Lu.

⁶ A number of recently published tablets, made available on CDLI, come from private collections with uncertain provenience. While a few Archaic tablets were excavated at Umma, significant numbers of additional tablets have been attributed to the site.

yield eight of the canonical 114 lines, together with a significant number of lines that bear no resemblance to later texts, even though the signs clearly depict vessels. Significantly, one of the two Uruk IV Vessels lists preserves a single TUG₂ sign, indicating that already the list of vessels also included a later section on textiles, as was true in the canonical list into the ED. The one Uruk IV Metals list (W 16621,a) includes only four entries of the 88 lines in the Uruk III list. This tablet ends with GA'AR, cheese. This is a departure from the canonical list sequence where, in fact, cheeses comprise the middle section of Vessels, between containers and textiles.

That these three lists – Lu, Vessels, and Metals – are the earliest lexical tablets attested is no surprise. As noted above, Lu was the most popular of the Uruk III lexical lists. Vessels, with over 90 Uruk III attestations, and Metals (54) trailed it, but these two lists were second and fourth (after “Tribute”/Word List C) in numbers of attestations in Uruk III, and spread beyond Uruk. A final Uruk IV lexical text, W 9123,d, fits no identified text type (and is called a “Vocabulary” in Englund and Nissen 1993: 164); it does, however, provide an interesting view into the process of sign creation (Fig. 2). The tablet appears to be about half preserved, with five columns on the obverse, and a large pictograph of a vessel occupying the full reverse (Falkenstein 1936: 43). On the obverse, each column contains variations on a different sign shape: in column i, all are triangles, pointed downward; column ii has arrangements of straight lines, some alone and some perpendicular; column iii has circles; column iv, boxes; column v has only two preserved signs, whose relationship is unclear. Within a given column, each entry derives from the basic shape category. This sort of elaboration was a fertile mode of sign creation in early stages of Sumerian writing, and is found, especially, in the Archaic lexical corpus; most of these signs, however (see, for example, the vessel signs, Ross 2010), were not used in contemporary administrative texts, and most died out by the time copies of the Archaic texts were made in the Old Babylonian period, the sign “containers” replaced by sign sequences. It is possible that this tablet was made by a scribe in the early stages of training, who drew his signs with precision but not efficiency. But it is also possible that this tablet belongs to a very early stage in the development of writing, wherein scribes were just beginning to develop rules of sign creation.

By Uruk III, the lexical corpus was far richer, with a proliferation of copies of previously invented lists, the spread of lexical lists (together with administrative documents) to new sites, and the development of additional lists. The new lists included a variant on the Lu list, called Officials; like Lu, it contained professional titles. To the previous lists of manufactured items (Metals and Vessels, with their additional entries on cheeses and textiles), the scribes added lists of natural phenomena: animals of various sorts (Animals, Fish, Birds, and Pigs) and plants (Plants, Wood). We also find geographical lists (Geography, Cities) and processed foods (Food/Grain). Finally, a popular list, “Tribute”/Word List C, is different; some of its entries begin with numbers other than “one,” and it combines signs from various different types of lists. Veldhuis (2006: 193) has suggested that this last text, which includes a

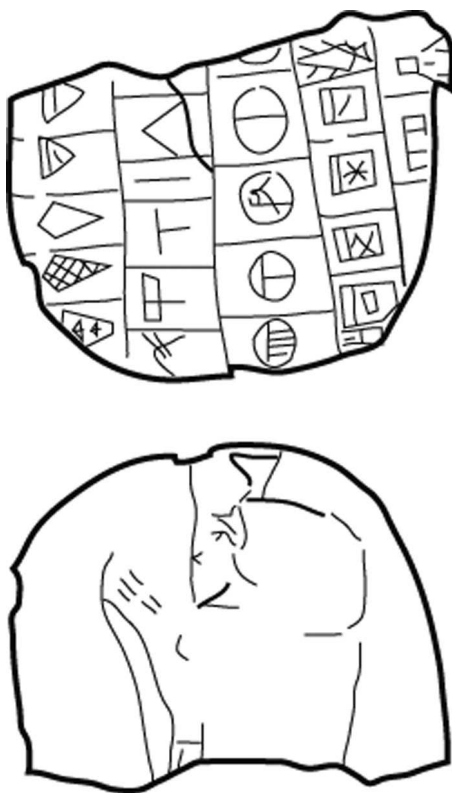


Figure 2: W 9123,d. Lexical text belonging to the Uruk IV paleographic stage. After Englund and Nissen 1993: Taf. 81, 9.

number of common commodities (milk, cows, bulls, ewes) as well as professions, was intended as a “quick reference guide” with a number of practical economic and administrative terms scribes would need in day-to-day practice. Others (Englund 1998: 99) have suggested that this list may be the first true “literary” text in the ancient Near East.

This proliferation of lists suggests that the inventive processes of the Uruk IV paleographic stage had proven both useful and evocative for the next generation(s) of scribes, who developed new principles of organization, and who standardized the older lists. The rules for the organization of a list vary from text to text; the Lu list, in general, seems to be hierarchical, with the most important administrative positions at the beginning. Vessels and Metals, in contrast, were organized according to repeated or elaborated groupings of similar objects. The same is true of Animals, where entries are arranged by animal type: varieties of cow, of ox/bull, of calf, and of wild bull. Within each type, the order of entries is the same. Less clear are the ordering principles behind such lists as Birds, Fish, and Pigs, largely because the individual entries have proven difficult to translate or identify. It is clear, however, that the Uruk III scribes shaped each lexical list according to a set of criteria and classificatory rules that made sense to them.

At the same time, there is some disconnect between the contents of the Archaic lexical texts and the sign corpus used in the more prevalent contemporary administrative texts. Of the 783 distinct signs identified in the Archaic sign list (Green and Nissen 1987), 92 are found only in the lexical corpus, 339 only in administrative texts, while 352 are found in both types of tablets. While this distribution does not necessitate two different groups of scribes working on the two corpora, it does suggest that the texts had distinctly different purposes. If the lexical genre was invented so that new scribes could be trained for their work in administration, why did the lexical lists not focus on signs and sign combinations that would be most useful in recording the economic transactions in which they were participants and witnesses? Rather, lexical invention was its own field of endeavor, one that had its own logic, practices, and practicalities. The invention of lexical lists came out of a different set of interactions as well, distinct, though not entirely separated, from the economic encounters and exchanges documented in administrative texts. For that reason, it is necessary to expand this inquiry into sign invention to encompass other contemporary modes of communication, to better understand the choices made by the first scribes at Uruk.

Seals and Visual Communication

Much has been written over the past two decades about the systems of communication in the ancient Near East that predated, and could have served as models for, the cuneiform writing system. I will not repeat the arguments here. While Denise Schmandt-Besserat's theory that tokens – the small, (mostly) clay objects in geometric forms that are found throughout the Near East from the Neolithic onward – were the principal precursors to writing goes too far in claiming priority for them as the main, or sole, inspiration for the cuneiform signs developed in the Late Uruk period, there is no doubt that tokens played a major role in communication in the centuries prior to writing's invention.⁷ Most telling, in this regard, is their presence within clay bullae – “envelopes” marked with apparently numeric symbols – found at sites in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Iran that date to a phase just before the earliest tablets. Computed tomography (CT) scans of unopened bullae have revealed tokens inside, sometimes matching the numbers and types of signs impressed on the bulla's surface (Damerow and Meinzer 1995). Given their widespread distribution, their later explicit use in transactions, as confirmed by a second millennium bulla from Nuzi with specific notation of its contents (Oppenheim 1959), and the presence of bullae sealed with Iranian seals at Uruk (see below), it seems likely that the bullae accompanied items

⁷ The fullest presentation of Schmandt-Besserat's theory was the two-volume *Before Writing* (1992; also 1996), but her work on the use of tokens goes back to a series of articles on the early non-ceramic uses of clay in the Near East (1974, 1977a, 1977b, 1978). Significant critiques include Lieberman (1980), Michalowski (1993), and Oates (1993).

being transported for exchange and served (with their tokens) as receipts or confirmations of delivery of a specific set of goods: early bills of lading.⁸

Bullae were not the only sealed items of the fourth millennium and earlier. The process of sealing wet clay with a distinctive design, specific to an activity, individual or institution, was a practice attested in the Near East during the Halaf period of the sixth millennium and earlier (Buchanan 1984; Duistermaat 2000; Stein 1997). The earliest Mesopotamian seals were stamp seals, with the invention of cylinder seals taking place during the Uruk period, probably first in Syria or Iran and then spreading to Sumer. A review of seal production and design is unnecessary here; major studies have been conducted by Frankfort (1939), Moortgat (1966), and Collon (1987, 1990). Many scholars have focused on the style and development of seals from a single geographic location or period; the earliest cylinder seals in the Near East have been studied, in particular, by Amiet (1972, 1980), Pittman (1994) and Rova (1994). One challenge to reconstructing changes in seal use and design over time has been a lack of well-stratified excavated sequences of seals and impressions, but that situation has been gradually alleviated, particularly by excavations outside the core region of southern Mesopotamia; hundreds of seal impressions belonging to the Late Uruk period alone have been recovered and published, including those from Tepe Gawra (Rothman 2001), Tell Brak and Chagar Bazar (Mallowan 1947), and Susa (Amiet 1972).

As noted above, the earliest Near Eastern stamp seals and impressions belong to the Halaf period or just before. According to Lamberg-Karlovsky (1999), the emergence of seal use at this time indicates a growth in social stratification and differentiation within kin groups; their application took place in private transactions at the household level until the Uruk period. By the Ubaid period, the fifth millennium, seal use spread to Sumer and the Susiana plain. Even with the introduction of cylinder seals to Mesopotamia in the Late Uruk period, stamp seals did not go away entirely; finely worked stone seals in animal shapes are found at a number of Uruk period sites, although it is not clear whether they served as seals (they have designs on one side) or simply as amulets, as stamp seal impressions are rare by this time (Behm-Blancke 1979).

On stamp seals of the Halaf period, designs were geometric; they include cross-hatching and other net patterns, rayed dots, and rosettes. Such seals and their imprints had no single orientation: they could be “read” in the same way from any direction. By the Ubaid period, the variety of motifs had expanded into scenes from nature, although geometric designs did not disappear. Among the most common Ubaid motifs were single or multiple animals (caprids, birds, lions, bovids, and snakes), sometimes with a central human figure holding a pair of animals or snakes, the so-called “Master of Animals” motif. Although many of these scenes provide a

⁸ See also the analysis of clay sealings from Hacinebi, in southeastern Anatolia, showing that the bullae found there, with Uruk-type seal impressions, likely came from Iran (Blackman 1999).

clear ground line, some still have the animals arrayed in a circular pattern, with no obvious orientation. The same motifs continued into the fourth millennium Early and Middle Uruk periods, when the only major change was the increased use of a drill to carve the seal design.

With the introduction of cylinder seals in the Late Uruk period, we see both continuity and change in terms of motifs, technologies, and items sealed (Boehmer 1999; Rova 1994). In general, the same categories of scenes were still produced – animals in files or combats, people in a variety of poses, a few geometric designs (particularly outside Mesopotamia proper) – while some new types of objects and details from daily life and state ritual, including pots, tools, architecture, and boats appear (Topçuoğlu 2010). A similar range of motifs is found at Uruk, in western Iran at Susa, Godin Tepe and Chogha Mish, and in Syrian sites such as Habuba Kabira, Tell Brak, and Jebel Aruda. Buchanan (1966: 3) characterizes these themes generally as relating to “worship, wealth, work, and war.”

At the same time, the larger surface extent provided by the cylinder format meant that seal designs could become more complex. One reason for this may be the need for individualized seals for use by a larger number of people or bureaucratic divisions in urban settings, as the administrative documents at Uruk attest. Rova (1994) notes that cylinder seals were introduced just as economic production and redistribution expanded and as administrative roles became further differentiated. Seal-carvers met this demand by combining motifs into larger scenes, a technique applied also to representational art forms such as the contemporary Warka Vase. Complex scenes were created by juxtaposing two or three motifs on a single baseline, or by superimposing them in more or less formal registers (Amiet 1980; Schmandt-Besserat 2007). Most often, the seal designs were made more complex by the addition of more figures, especially human figures in various poses, or by the insertion of secondary motifs like pots or architecture.⁹

While cylinder and stamp seals exhibit the same styles, techniques, and materials, the sealing action itself was adapted for the new cylinder form, from impressing to rolling. In turn, this shaped perhaps the most important change in glyptic that took place in the Late Uruk period: the nature of the items being sealed. The small surface area of the stamp seal, and the stamping motion itself, were appropriate to small pieces of clay that closed jars, bags, boxes, and other containers. But a cylinder seal covered a much larger surface area, with a seemingly endlessly repeated pattern. Seal-holders rapidly took advantage of the opportunity. It is precisely at this time that clay bullae developed, and soon thereafter, tablets. Documented at Uruk, and probably also at Susa, is the introduction of door sealing practices, for which a larger surface area was also necessary (Rigillo 1991).

⁹ See Rova (1994) for the detailed description and analysis of the geographic distribution of Late Uruk seal motifs.

Seal form, design, and function evolved concurrently; the continuity of glyptic motifs from the fifth to the fourth millennium is remarkable, both for the length of time they endured, and for their geographical spread, from southwestern Iran to northern Syria. Seal designs of the Ubaid and Uruk periods also echo motifs found in other media: birds and caprids, usually stylized, are found on significant numbers of painted Susa A ceramics, while the human and animal “narrative” scenes of Late Uruk cylinder seals are closely related to relief and three-dimensional sculpture. The stylized nature of the motifs, the varied scenes and settings, and the inventive imagery indicate that Late Uruk period artists – sculptors, painters, and seal-carvers – did not strictly derive imagery from observation of nature, but filtered motifs through experiences and imaginations in a way that resulted in unique, but recognizable, products.

Beyond Correlation: New Methods of Communication in the Late Uruk Period

Part of the appeal of Denise Schmandt-Besserat’s theory that token use ultimately led to writing is its inherent materiality; the clay of the tokens and bullae, and the physical process of pushing tokens into the wet clay of the bullae before enclosing them, mirror the materials and movements of the earliest Late Uruk scribes. The final stage in the process of creating a clay bulla was to roll one or more cylinder seals over the entire wet clay surface (and, occasionally, to impress a stamp seal as well). These markings may have identified the sender(s) or party/ies responsible for the goods’ delivery, or the witness(es) to a transaction; as Pittman (1994) has noted, we do not know the precise reasons for seal use in this period. But together, the tokens, impressed bullae, and seal impressions encapsulated a transaction, providing a way to extend its reach in time and/or space.

Seals and Tablets

The production of clay bullae preceded and overlapped in time with the earliest numerical tablets (tablets of “Uruk V” type), the latter attested at Uruk, Iran, and Syria, with the largest number (115) coming from Susa in southwestern Iran. These tablets appear to have eliminated the need for tokens, as numeric signs impressed on one face now indicated quantities and perhaps types of goods. These documents were also, usually, completely covered with seal impressions (of up to three different seals), just as clay bullae had been. The majority of the tablets from Susa were impressed with one seal; the impressions occur in registers across the obverse of the tablet, and sometimes the reverse. Numeric signs were impressed after sealing, and generally follow the same orientation or direction as the sealing.

Given the prevalence of sealing on the numerical tablets, the seal impression must have conveyed significant information about the transaction recorded, and presumably the seal was held by the scribe or official making out the tablet, as he sealed the tablet before impressing the numbers.¹⁰ At Susa, many different seals were used, while at Uruk there were fewer seal-holders and scribes, who sealed a larger number of tablets each. The seal motifs may have provided information on the items being transacted, or the administrative division to which the goods belonged; Susa tablet Sb 1944bis (Fig. 3a) shows a pair of weavers on the obverse (Amiet 1972: 105, no. 673), so perhaps the transaction took place within the weaving establishment, or supplied raw materials to weavers or finished products from them. But, a correspondence of seal iconography and transaction is usually less clear: are the 103 items enumerated on Uruk numerical tablet W 6883,a (Fig. 3b) ibexes, lions, or some other type of animal, given the array of animals on the seal (Boehmer 1999: Abb. 51E)? It seems more likely that sealing a tablet denoted some general form of authority, but that the specific roles played by seal-holders might not be evident from the iconography of their seals (Pittman 1994). And some transactions could take place without a seal, as indicated by the significant number of unsealed numerical tablets. It is probable that certain actions required no witness or indication of authority.

Tracing these developments exposes a clear and consistent interaction among seals and documents, seal-holders and tablet-makers, in a web of interconnections within administrative spaces: the Eanna and Anu precincts at Uruk, the Acropolis at Susa, and eventually the “palace” at Jemdet Nasr and other places where tablets were created. These interrelationships are also striking at the level of technological action. The predominant material for seal impressions since the Halaf period had been clay, ideally suited to taking an impressed or incised design, as potters had already discovered in the millennia prior. The clay of seal impressions and tablets was, however, different from the clay used by potters and brickmakers, with the latter two professional groups adding a variety of tempering materials to augment the characteristics of their clays; tablet and sealing clay tended to be finer, with coarse natural inclusions removed, and little or no additional temper (Schmandt-Besserat 1980: 363). Gesture also connected the actions of the first scribes to users of seals, whether stamp or cylinder. The act of pressing a seal into wet clay is analogous to the process of making cuneiform signs: both products are “impressions.”

Even without regarding the stages in the development of the writing system as evolutionary, each an outgrowth of the previous step (as Michalowski warns against), there are clear material and technical connections over time, traced above, as well as specific transitions to be explained. While numerical tablets appear at sites across the Near East, the initial pictographic tablets come solely from Uruk. This means that the transition from impressed numbers to incised pictographs occurred only at one site.

¹⁰ Matthews (1993: 25) has made this observation in regard to the Jemdet Nasr (Uruk III) tablets.

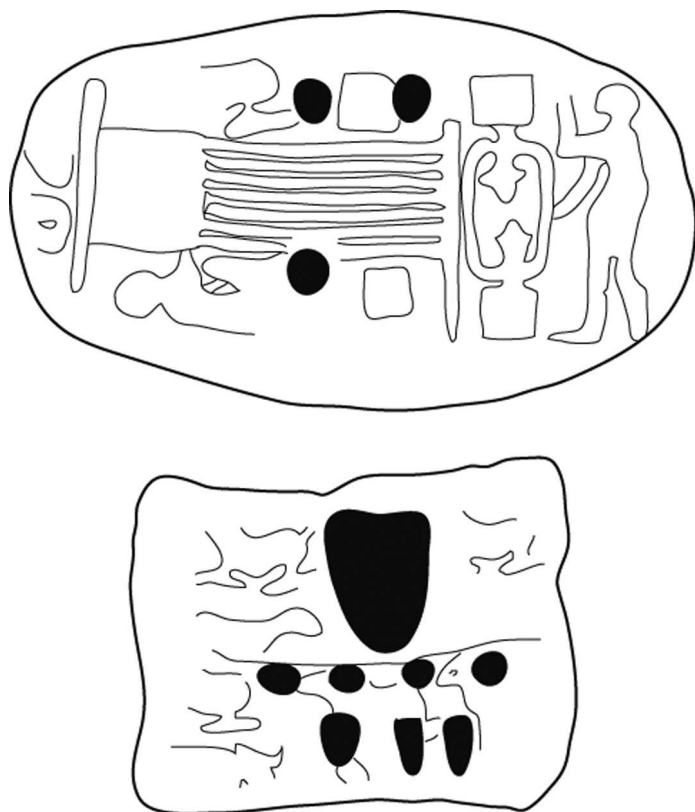


Figure 3a and Figure 3b: (3a) Sb 1944bis. Numerical tablet from Susa. After Amiet 1972: no. 673. **(3b)** W 6883, a. Numerical tablet from Uruk. After Boehmer 1999: Abb. 51E.

The large numbers of sealed tablets that were attested among the numerical tablets then declined as the new pictographic tablets of Uruk IV developed. Matthews (1993: 26) estimates that only 3% of the pictographic (Uruk IV and III) tablets from Uruk were sealed, as compared to about half of the numerical (Uruk V) tablets from the same site. Seal use on lexical texts was even less common, accounting for less than one percent of the Archaic lexical tablets. But sealing practices varied from site to site, with about 33% of the tablets from Jemdet Nasr (dating to the Uruk III paleographic stage) bearing seals; here, too, the tablets were sealed first, then inscribed (Matthews 1993: 26). As seal use declined, pictograms may have replaced some of the functions that seals had previously served (Moorey 1993: 27); they also enabled the types of transactions, and the items being transacted, to be recorded with greater specificity than the numerical and glyptic systems had previously provided. With the development of pictographic signs, multiple transactions could be recorded on a single tablet. All of this is in accordance with the more complex needs of the

administrative specialists housed in the Eanna complex at Uruk. The Uruk IV pictographic tablets occur in a variety of shapes, sizes, and formats, indicating different transaction types and administrative requirements. Unsealed tablets often had smooth backs; large, detailed signs on the reverse, part of the colophon, may suggest a continuing role for art in the process of record-keeping.¹¹

Seals and Lexicality

So, then, what was the relationship of sealer and scribe, seal and tablet? The addition of lexical texts to the tablet corpus in Uruk IV may hold part of the key. If seals and seal impressions were central to the interactions and communications signified by clay bullae and numerical tablets just prior and contemporary to the invention of script, why would their use decline? In part, the explanation must be that the pictographs were capable of expressing the same information as seals, and whatever authority or transaction type was conveyed via sealing now was portrayed in script rather than seal.

But also, I contend that the scribes who invented the script, and created the Uruk IV tablets, were experimenting with new ways to record and categorize the elements of seal design that had been of use in the past. They did this by inventing the lexical genre. The signs of the lexical lists were not primarily substitutes for, or even specifically modeled on, motifs from Late Uruk period seals (although some clear examples of this exist). Rather, glyptic art provided the raw materials for *thinking* about signs, about tablets, and about information that needed to be communicated. In the face of a more complicated set of social, political, and economic interactions taking place within the Eanna precinct at Uruk, the first scribes strove to transmit and transform their knowledge, and to provide a set of guidelines for its promulgation and elaboration. With greater numbers of administrators and bureaucratic functions, no longer would individual seals be differentiated enough to distinguish one person's identity and authority from another's, or the particular type of action taken. The solution, in part, was therefore to collect and organize those features encoded in seal design, compiling them into sign and tablet form.

Uruk V and IV Seal Iconography

While a general description of seal motifs of the Uruk period appears above, the support for my proposal that lexical texts originated from a process of ordering and reorganizing glyptic imagery comes from a more detailed view of the seals and

¹¹ These may be precursors to the ED period tablets from Fara, such as VAT 9130 (Deimel 1923: SF 75), with intricate designs on the back; interestingly, VAT 9130, with serpentine designs, is a lexical list.

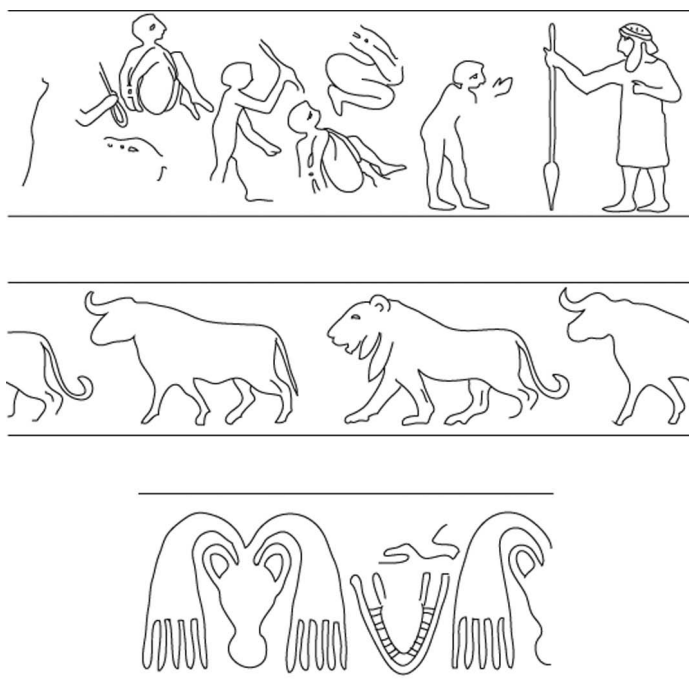


Figure 4a, Figure 4b and Figure 4c: (4a) Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. Prisoners. After Boehmer 1999: Taf. 17. **(4b)** Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. Animals. After Boehmer 1999: Taf. 75. **(4c)** Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. Vessels and an animal. After Boehmer 1999: Taf. 77, Nr. 25.

impressions discovered at Uruk. While no cylinder seal has been found at Uruk in a primary context, dozens of seal impressions have been assigned to the earlier part of the Late Uruk period (paleographic stages V and IV); designs include a variety of human and animal scenes (Boehmer 1999). Like the tablets, seal impressions were discarded once they had served their purpose; they were later incorporated as refuse into building fills, and are therefore rarely found in primary contexts.

Many of the earliest cylinder seal impressions at Uruk occur on large door sealings (Rigillo 1991) as well as attached to fabric, wood, ceramics, and matting; a limited number of seals were used on the door sealings, suggesting special access to the contents of the rooms those doors closed. Motifs on door and container sealings include images of people carrying objects toward a building, in a procession reminiscent of the offering bearers on the Warka Vase (Boehmer 1999: 20). At least seven different seals had scenes with prisoners, recognizable by twisted body form, kneeling position, and bound arms and/or hands (Boehmer 1999: 20–24) (Fig. 4a). Another popular seal design, on at least four different seals, used especially to seal doors, was a line of animals walking in the same direction, often including lions (Boehmer 1999: 27–29) (Fig. 4b). Heroic human figures fight or dominate lions in a pair of other seal

designs (Boehmer 1999: 27). Finally, at least five different seals were used on sealings showing groups of vessels (Boehmer 1999: 29–33) (Fig. 4c).

Also assigned to Uruk V date, because of their style, were several spherical bullae containing tokens. The seal designs on the bullae include animals in a file (sometimes just the front part of the animal is depicted) (Fig. 5), people standing by buildings, and others carrying objects in their hands and on their heads. While the individual motifs are familiar, their combination and unusual styles suggested to Boehmer (1999: 114) that these bullae originated in Iran and were sent to Uruk as part of a set of transactions.

Seals used on numerical tablets had similar motifs to the door and container sealings, but are also recognizably different. The differences involve predominantly motif combinations, although a few new elements occur as well (Boehmer 1999: 51–54). The scenes include a bearded man, identified as the city's leader by his presence in a number of artistic scenes of the period, hunting boar in a marsh; another impression with the same figure shows him in a tasseled cap with his back to a building, holding long diagonal objects (reins?) before him (Boehmer 1999: 54). The combinations of animals in the seals on numerical tablets are also noticeably different; especially popular was a scene juxtaposing lion(s), bovine, and bird, with various types of pots in the field (Boehmer 1999: Abb. 47). Another from this time period had awkwardly-depicted crouching lions, together with walking bovines, caprids, and a dog (Boehmer 1999: Abb. 51E) (Fig. 6). Snaky-necked animals and cows crouching on scale-patterned hills also make an appearance (Boehmer 1999: Abb. 55 and 56). Finally, a group of numerical tablets from the White Temple, made from gypsum, had a unique seal impression, with three frontal human figures, arms stretched out or upward, with animals, plants, and geometric motifs in the field (Boehmer 1999: 87) (Fig. 7). These tablets were sealed in clear "registers," and the tablets were pressed against a mat, which left a distinct woven impression on the reverse; a single large circle was impressed in the middle of one edge of the obverse of each. Another tablet from the Anu ziggurat shows cows coming out of reed huts; yet another depicts a boat (Boehmer 1999: 86).

Seal impressions of the early Late Uruk period thus show tremendous variety of seal design and use, suggesting that a range of administrators at Uruk held seals, and that their occupations, and the transactions being marked, were growing more specialized: some controlled storage, others oversaw transactions. A separate group of seal-holders worked in the Anu precinct. Under these conditions, seal-carvers were called on to diversify traditional motifs, recombining them and adding new ones, so that individuals could still be recognized from the mark of their seals. A good example is the prisoner scene found on door sealings of the early phase of the Uruk period; the seven seals differed from one another primarily in the number of people (both prisoners and guards) represented, their precise gestures, and the objects represented in the hands of guards and on the ground. The limits of the system may have rapidly become clear, particularly as seals belonging to different people or denoting different actions

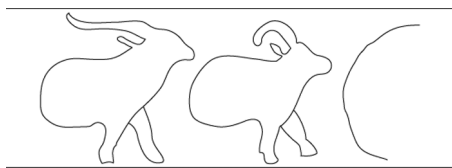


Figure 5: Reconstructed seal impression from a bulla, from Uruk. Animals. After Boehmer 1999: Taf. 81, Nr. 30.



Figure 6: W 6883,a (see Fig. 3b) and other numerical tablets, reconstructed seal impression, from Uruk. After Boehmer 1999: Abb. 51.



Figure 7: Reconstructed seal impression from Uruk. People, plants, and animals. After Boehmer 1999: Abb. 93.

may have lost their distinctiveness when used on a tablet; the seal impression could have been obliterated or obscured by the impression of numbers. Even a person familiar with the iconography may have had difficulty discerning one such seal from another. A very different set of requirements seems to have characterized Uruk IV tablets, when pictographic signs could convey some of the same information, providing identification markers of authority or activity; under these circumstances, seal use on tablets quickly declined.

On bullae, numerical tablets, and pictographic tablets, those who oversaw and participated in the transactions recorded took part in very different sorts of activities. Sealed bullae recorded transactions at a distance, with the bullae exchanged together with, or serving as a receipt for, a set of objects. Numerical tablets encoded transactions that took place face to face, providing information regarding goods, amounts and participants. A similar selection of information was set down on a pictographic tablet, but this time, the transaction required the presence of a specialist, a scribe, to properly record it. In each case, the clay record served as a receipt, encoding both the transaction and the identity of (at least) one participant. Seals had served as identifying marks for millennia before; with the advent of pictographs, though, those identities and actions could now be recorded in writing.

In order for the new, pictographic system to work well, scribes needed to invent an appropriate array of signs that would substitute for information previously communicated by glyptic imagery. Some of these signs derived directly from artistic motifs of the Late Uruk period; the EN sign, for instance, occurs on the Warka Vase, and various divine symbols, presumably representations of the

standards that stood before their temples, were depicted in both seal designs and other artwork (Hockmann 2008: 329, Abb. 2; Cooper 2008; Szarzynska 1996). But for the majority of titles and transaction types, a new system of signs needed to be developed.

The Uruk IV, and later Uruk III, lexical lists were a product of the scribes' attempts to sort through the corpus of glyptic motifs and develop (some of) them into a viable collection of signs. In this process, the scribes removed individual motifs from their original contexts within a larger glyptic scene, and grouped "like" motifs, a process in common with classificatory procedures everywhere, though categories themselves are culturally contingent. For instance, in the scenes of prisoners being overseen by standing figures holding staffs, described above, the two types of humans – prisoners and guards – would go into a list of "person-types," while the staffs they hold would be classified among a list of objects. Eventually, the scribes also put the motifs/signs in each into a fixed order, and elaborated on them, finding ways to express variations on a category, or a variety of subcategories.

This, then, was the process that created the first lexical texts. In my reconstruction, the earliest purpose for these texts was to serve as a means of abstraction, experimentation, and elaboration of a preexisting vocabulary of visual signs, transferred to a different, but not entirely "new" format, the tablet. It is then no accident that the Uruk IV lexical lists – Lu, Metals, and Vessels – were drawn from the most common motifs and scenes of the previous generations of glyptic: people playing a variety of roles and in varied settings, interacting with objects (the "tools" of the Metals list) and vessels. Textiles, beads, and milk products (cheese) are secondary topics of these particular lists (textiles and cheeses appended to Vessels, stone beads at the end of Metals); these items also are featured in the seal iconography, though rendered by different visual forms.

These lists were then supplemented, in Uruk III, with others also drawn from the glyptic repertoire: lists of animals, plants and trees (and wooden objects), and additional administrative titles. The Pig list of Uruk III has generated a variety of interpretations (Englund 1995: 129–32); it could, from the perspective advanced here, be a list of (mostly wild) animals found in Late Uruk period iconography, particularly lions, boars, and dogs. Similarly, scholars have examined the relationship of the various geographic lists from Uruk III to the City Seal type, attested on administrative documents from Jemdet Nasr; Matthews (1993) suggests that the seal type, which has two registers of pictographs of city names, duplicating the beginning lines of the canonical Cities List, was used for texts recording some sort of joint action among the towns of southern Mesopotamia.

Finally, it is with the Uruk III lexical texts that we see a first possible foray into teaching, with the composition of "Tribute"/Word List C (Veldhuis 2006). The majority of the entries in this list bridge both lexical and administrative sign corpora – it is, therefore, quite different from other lists, in which many of the individual signs and sign combinations were unattested in administrative texts. Not until writing technol-

ogy took hold at Uruk, and proved equally useful at other Mesopotamian cities, did the need to train new generations of scribes arise.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper, on the development of writing, has taken an old topic, but used a new entry point – lexical lists – to explore its setting and principal stages of development. The appearance of lexical lists at the same time as the earliest administrative texts requires an explanation other than a function in scribal education or training. There were no scribes before the Late Uruk period, and therefore no one to educate. Even after the first pictographic texts emerged, there was no formal or consistent relationship between the lexical lists and the contents of the administrative texts. My inquiry into how lexical lists originated has led to seal iconography and function as the most likely source for the various list subjects. In essence, lexical lists could have served as a “storage” mechanism for the seal iconography of previous generations.

The approach I have taken draws from technology-centered research in archaeology and anthropology, which looks at technologies (such as writing) as “ways of doing” that are deeply embedded in cultural systems, but are also highly flexible (Dobres 2000; Lemonnier 1993). In contexts of social, political and/or economic change, skilled practitioners of some technologies may develop new ways to accomplish the same thing (like potters moving from a slow to fast wheel), or may adapt traditional techniques for new purposes (such as a smith who, when first confronted with iron, applies bronze-working techniques to it). That seal use and writing were long intertwined in Mesopotamia is not a revolutionary observation. But that observation may lead us to another: in the urban setting of Late Uruk period Uruk, the city’s growing population and range of functions resulted in an increasing need to formalize and regularize communication, so that information could be extended both temporally (stored outside of memory for longer periods) and spatially (used in transactions over great distances, crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries). With these requirements, at least one group of scribes came from an established communications profession, that of seal-carving. At a somewhat trivial level, seal-carvers already understood the properties of clay, but they also recognized the power of signs and symbols to communicate complex messages about identity and action. And they were already employed in administrative contexts. Because of the nature of their cognitive raw materials, seal-carvers also already understood issues of syntax and grammar: the motifs they employed could be combined and positioned in different ways to create new meanings. Seal imagery also had the capacity to be understood cross-culturally, across linguistic boundaries, a particularly important factor as Uruk Mesopotamia expanded its political and economic reach (Algaze 2008).

A focus on technological knowledge and choices opens up potential linkages not previously considered by scholars examining writing’s origins. Scribal praxis, as it

first unfolded in the Uruk V-IV tablet transactions, required individuals to make use of prior technological domains, as well as a high degree of experimentation and play. As a broad array of people with different backgrounds – artists, smiths, metalworkers, farmers, weavers, priests, and bureaucrats – worked together at Uruk, their interactions produced the urban composition of this first city, and communication technologies were forever changed. The invention of cuneiform writing merged practical needs with creative practices, offering strategies for scribes to develop their own identities in a newly invented occupation, with ties to the past and to all writers of the future.

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Melissa Eppihimer

Posthumous Images and the Memory of the Akkadian Kings

Abstract: Historical consciousness in Mesopotamia was expressed in texts, in the treatment of ancient objects, and in visual allusions to older art forms, but images representing historical figures from a past beyond the reign of the living ruler are largely unknown. This article considers reasons for the absence of this kind of posthumous image by examining the case of the Akkadian kings, who were prominent figures in the Mesopotamian past. Secondary reasons, such as the poor preservation of materials and the bias of the archaeological record towards elite contexts, are unlikely to be the cause of this absence. Instead, aspects of the legacy of the Akkadians and Mesopotamian culture more generally appear to have prevented the production of posthumous images of the Akkadians. Unlike another heroic king, Gilgamesh, the Akkadian kings do not appear as protective figures in seals and plaques because of their inescapable humanity. The literary compositions that celebrated the Akkadian kings often communicated the important role played by scribes in the preservation of memory, but artists were not in a similar position to engage the legacy of the Akkadians to their advantage, and thus there are no visual renderings of these rhetorical compositions. Most fundamentally, a system of representation wherein images were manifestations of the persons they depicted made “revisualizations” of the past existentially problematic. As a result, rulers did not produce posthumous images of the Akkadian kings to commemorate these royal exemplars.

Keywords: Akkadian kings, commemoration, historical art, historical consciousness, memory, scribes, artists, literature, posthumous images

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Introduction

References to ancient rulers in king lists, chronicles, and other historiographic texts attest to a historical discourse in ancient Mesopotamia that reached far into the past. In contrast, among Mesopotamian images with historical content – that is, images of people and events from the past – the past is generally no more distant than the reign of the living ruler. Visual references to the more remote human past were made instead through archaisms or allusions to earlier images (Ehrenberg 1998; Roaf 2000). To examine this limitation on the role of images in the expression of historical

memory in Mesopotamia, I turn to the case of the Akkadian kings, who occupied a significant place in Mesopotamian history according to both modern and ancient perspectives. If in Mesopotamia historical images had been used to celebrate or even critique the achievements of renowned historical figures, then the Akkadian kings would have been prime subjects for posthumous visualization.

Against competing claims to hegemony, Sargon of Akkad (2334–2279 BCE), the founder of the Akkadian dynasty, gained control over the city-states of Mesopotamia.¹ To facilitate the Akkadian state's centralized authority, Sargon and his successors cultivated a form of kingship that elevated the ruler to a more celebrated position than was experienced by previous rulers. This process culminated in the deification of king Naram-Sin (2254–2218 BCE). The impact of these developments was deeply felt within Mesopotamian cultural memory, and the Akkadian kings became exemplars of kingship for their good and bad traits (J. Westenholz 1983; Glassner 1986; Jonker 1995). Among the tangible reminders of the Akkadian kings were their statues and steles that remained standing in temple precincts. These monuments received offerings, their inscriptions were collected and copied by scribes, and they became visual models for later royal images. Less concrete, but no less significant links to the Akkadian kings were established by the reuse of their names among later rulers, and by the development of literary texts narrating in colorful detail the exploits of Sargon and Naram-Sin. Yet there are no known visual representations of Sargon journeying through a darkened forest or Naram-Sin battling bird-faced enemy hordes, both episodes found in the literary compositions, nor are there any other images representing the Akkadian kings posthumously. Cooper (1990: 40) has suggested that there were no visual equivalents to the literary texts featuring the Akkadians because the materials of monuments – stone, metal, wood – were costly, leading the patrons of art, that is, rulers, to concentrate their expenses on works celebrating their own actions. However, cost was not a factor for many rulers. Consider the Neo-Assyrian kings (ninth-seventh centuries BCE), whose wealth was astonishing, and whose access to stones for lining their palace walls with carved images was seemingly unlimited. That even they, especially Sargon II (721–705 BCE), whose name invoked the founder of the Akkadian dynasty, would not commission images that commemorated the Akkadian kings by depicting them suggests that there are other reasons for the absence of posthumous images of the Akkadians. For scholars interested in the Akkadian legacy, or in Mesopotamian art and historical consciousness more generally, a posthumously produced image of Sargon or Naram-Sin would be a remarkable and welcome find. But until such an image emerges, it is necessary to try to understand the possible reasons behind its absence. These reasons reveal much about the value of the Akkadian legacy within the different segments of Mesopotamian society

¹ For a history of the period, see A. Westenholz 1999. The dates used in this article are those of Brinkman, in Oppenheim 1977: 335–46.

that engaged with the memory of the Akkadians, as well as the role of images in that process.

Remembering the Akkadian Kings

The legacy of the Akkadian kings was a multi-faceted phenomenon that survived two millennia after the fall of the Akkadian dynasty. Its literary, artifactual, and visual components demonstrate the various ways in which the memory of the Akkadians was created and exercised. Short references to the Akkadian kings in omens (Finkelstein 1963), chronicles (Glassner 2004), and geographies (Horowitz 1998: 67–95) confirm that the Akkadians were anchors in the Mesopotamian view of the past, but the literary compositions that feature the Akkadians as protagonists give substance to the Akkadians' legacy. The compositions, which represent an *etic* modern collection and not any *emic* ancient corpus, are quite heterogeneous (J. Westenholz 1997; Potts 2001: 392–93). Some of the texts are written as first-person narratives, while others are conducted in the third person with ample quotations. Many pretend to be authentic Akkadian inscriptions, on occasion even self-identifying as a *narû*, a term referring to inscribed stone monuments (J. Westenholz 1993: 205–13). Such variety can be attributed to the different origins of the written exemplars (sites in Mesopotamia, Syria, Anatolia, and Egypt), their different languages (Akkadian, Sumerian, and Hittite), and their different dates (from the late third millennium BCE to the middle of the first millennium BCE).² Further contributing to the variety are the different circumstances in which the narratives were written down, ranging from the trial efforts of scribal students to polished copies included in royal libraries. Finally, the specter of an oral tradition existing beyond the written literature complicates assessment of the latter (J. Westenholz 1992).³ This oral component of the Akkadian legacy is difficult to recover.

Because of these variables, and because the genres of Mesopotamian writing are ill-defined, scholars have struggled to agree upon a means to classify and label the compositions. Poetic narrative, saga, epic, legend, myth, fictional autobiography, and *narû*-literature are just a few of the English-language terms that have been applied to some or all of the exemplars (J. Westenholz 1997: 16–24; Haul 2009: 9–13, 95–131). Also problematic is the question of the historical value of the texts, that is, whether they contain any useful data regarding the events of Akkadian history (Liverani 1993; Potts 2001). Yet, even those who emphasize the problematic aspects of using ancient

2 In this essay I focus on the Mesopotamian aspects of the Akkadian legacy. The Akkadian legacies elsewhere, as in Anatolia (Beckman 2001), are distinct phenomena with different variables.

3 For more on the oral aspect of Mesopotamian literature, see the contributions in Vogelzang and Vanstiphout 1992.

historiography to produce modern histories cannot deny the historical framework that envelops these narratives.

Concurrent with the development of the Akkadian literary legacy, the monuments of the Akkadian kings were preserved, honored, and studied in what may be called the artifactual legacy of the Akkadians. In the Ur III period (2112–2095 BCE), the statues and steles of the Akkadian kings received offerings in temples (J. Westenholz 2008: 253–55). At Mari during the reign of Shamshi-Adad (1813–1781 BCE), representations of Sargon and Naram-Sin were included in rituals honoring royal ancestors (Durand and Guichard 1997: 63–70).⁴ In the Old Babylonian period (20th–17th cent. BCE) scribes copied inscriptions from the monuments of the Akkadians that remained standing in temple precincts. Two tablets from Nippur collect the inscriptions on monuments of Sargon, Rimush, and Manishtushu (Gelb and Kienast 1993: 139–47, 150–55); the grouping of the first three Akkadian kings together shows the scribes' awareness of the kings' historical connection. At Ur, tablets with copies of royal inscriptions were found in a house where scribes learned their trade (Charpin 1986: 425–27), and thus in scribal training the original inscriptions of the Akkadians were included alongside the literary compositions retelling their stories.

Even the act of removing an Akkadian monument from its setting was a sign of the importance of the Akkadians. When the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahhunte I raided Babylonia in the twelfth century BCE, he collected a by-then one-thousand-year-old stele of Naram-Sin from Sippar (Fig. 1), as well as statues of Manishtushu from Eshnunna and Akkade (Harper 1992). Shutruk-Nahhunte I's secondary inscriptions on the captured monuments include the names of the Akkadian kings, which suggests that he valued the antiquity and historical importance of the monuments' patrons (Feldman 2009: 44). Later, during the first millennium BCE, *in situ* examples of original Akkadian monuments must have been fewer – in no small part thanks to the Elamites – but the Neo-Babylonian period (625–539 BCE) witnessed a program that sought to recover physical traces of the past, including inscriptions, building foundations, and images of the Akkadians (Beaulieu 1994; Winter 2000).

The artifactual component of the Akkadian legacy focused on physical, primary traces of the Akkadian past. In contrast, the literary legacy embraced less tangible, posthumously developed narratives. This is not to say that the literary tradition did not interact with the artifacts of Akkadian kingship. In fact, the opposite appears to have been the case. Within the literary compositions there are multiple events, characters, and phrases that recall the original Akkadian royal inscriptions. These connections were made possible by the study and copying of the originals (Liverani 1993: 49–50). However, the posthumously developed narratives rarely stick to the Akkadian prototypes; instead, they add, subtract, embellish, and invent as needed to communicate the moral of their story, what Jonker (1995: 122) has called “renarration.” This seeming

4 On the possibility that these were produced by Shamshi-Adad, see below.

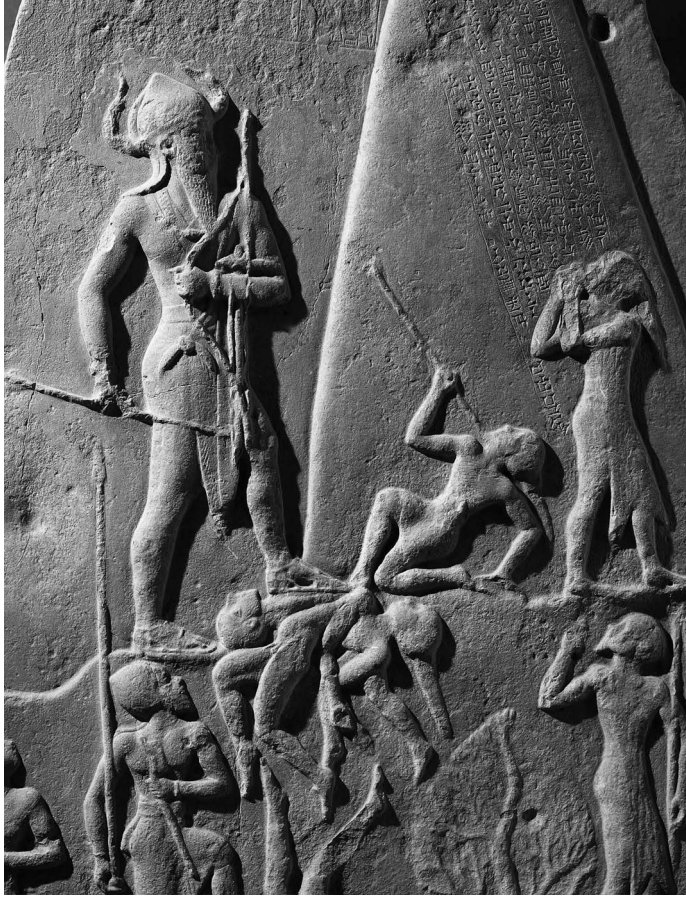


Figure 1: Detail of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin from his stele found at Susa. Akkadian period. Stele height 2.00 m, width 1.05 m. Louvre Sb 4. Courtesy of Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

irreverence for historical fact is not a failure to recognize, in a modern sense, the immutability of history, but instead acknowledges, in a postmodern sense, that historical narratives are selectively constructed and mutable.⁵

There is ample evidence that royal inscriptions, especially those of the Akkadians, came under criticism in Mesopotamian antiquity for not always being transparent or truthful. Aware of the possibility that their accounts may have seemed too good to be true, some of the Akkadian kings inserted a statement into their inscriptions declaring

⁵ Whether or not these narratives were regarded by their ancient audiences as fact or fiction is a subject of ongoing debate (Haul 2009).

the veracity of the content (Liverani 2011: 231–32).⁶ A passage in a royal hymn that presents the Ur III king Shulgi (2094–2047 BCE) as an ideal ruler implicitly acknowledges the bombast of royal monuments, perhaps even the Akkadians' monuments specifically, when it describes Shulgi's own royal inscriptions as being honest accounts of his achievements.⁷ An additional critique can be found in an Old Assyrian parody of an Akkadian royal inscription that questions the credibility of the king's claims by exaggerating Sargon of Akkad's feats to the level of comedy (Foster 2005: 71–75).⁸ If the original Akkadian monuments could be viewed as being built from bias, exaggeration, and unfounded claims, then the narratives in them could be modified, irrespective of actual events, in the literary versions of Sargon and Naram-Sin's affairs.

With such known contributions from the Akkadian monuments to the “renarration” of the Akkadian past in literary texts, we are left to wonder why Akkadian monuments did not contribute to a similar “revisualization” of Akkadian history in images. The monuments of the Akkadians were still visible in temples throughout Mesopotamia, and these could have been used as sources for new visual representations of the Akkadians, perhaps renderings related to the literary compositions. Yet the narratives featuring the Akkadians are not visualized in any extant examples of Mesopotamian art, nor is there any other kind of posthumous image overtly commemorating these legendary kings. Instead, the visual legacy of the Akkadian kings consists of the reuse of attributes, motifs, and styles from Akkadian monuments in later works of art that have as their subject matter contemporary persons and events (Eppihimer 2009), as late as the Achaemenid period (538–331 BCE) (Feldman 2007).

Making sense of an absence such as this one is inherently difficult. The absence of posthumous images of the Akkadian kings may be the result of historical factors from within Mesopotamia that prevented their production. Alternatively, the objects may have been produced, but are not preserved because of secondary reasons involved in the formation of the archaeological record. In this case, I would like to

6 “By the gods Shamash and Aba I swear that (these) are not falsehoods, (but) are indeed true.” RIME 2: 49, 54, 57–58, 76.

7 “Furthermore no one will assert under oath that to this day there is any mention in my inscriptions of a single city that I have not devastated, or wall that I have not demolished, or land that I have not made tremble like a reed hut, or praise that I have not completely verified. Why should a singer put them in hymns? An eminent example deserves eternal fame. What is the use of writing lies without truth?” (ETCSL: Shulgi Hymn B, lines 320–27). Liverani's (2002: 153–54) interpretation of the passage is somewhat different. He suggests that Shulgi offers a “pacifist” monument as a rejection of Akkadian violence and destruction. However, elsewhere in the hymn Shulgi praises his skills as a warrior (for example, lines 26–39). In the passage quoted here, the contrast with the Akkadians is not so much one of war-mongering versus pacifism, but of hyperbole versus truthfulness.

8 For the text as parody, see Van de Mieroop 2000: 146–59; Foster 2002; and Liverani 2011: 238–42. For alternate views, see Cavigneaux 2005; Dercksen 2005; Alster and Oshima 2007; and J. Westenholz 2007.

suggest that factors related to the nature of the Akkadian legacy and the making of images in Mesopotamia prevented the production of posthumous images commemorating the Akkadians.

Theoretically, the absence of posthumous images of the Akkadians could be due to the fact that they do not survive. Indeed, some of the materials of Mesopotamian art rarely survive. Wood is highly perishable, metal was frequently melted down, and wall paintings on mudbrick walls are fragile. However, the extant examples of Mesopotamian images produced in those less durable materials often repeat themes and subjects already known from more durable media, like stone and baked clay.⁹ Even the possible exceptions to this pattern are, on closer examination, not really exceptions. For example, the metal Bassetki statue of a nude hero has no equivalent in three-dimensional stone, but the figure is a type well-known from Akkadian cylinder seal iconography (al-Fouadi 1976). The general overlap between images produced in durable materials and images produced in rarely-preserved materials suggests that posthumous images of the Akkadians were unlikely to have been produced solely in wood, metal, or another material that does not survive.¹⁰

Another secondary factor influencing the make-up of the available corpus of Mesopotamian images is the history of Mesopotamian archaeology. During the formative years of the discipline in the nineteenth century, and long thereafter, excavations concentrated on loci of power like the palace and the temple. Over the course of the twentieth century archaeologists increasingly pursued the lives of non-elites, but the early bias tilted the archaeological record towards the visual culture of the elite, who were historically the primary patrons of the monumental arts. If the Akkadians were posthumously represented in the visual culture of the non-elites of Mesopotamia, then such images theoretically might be excluded from the corpus of Mesopotamian art by virtue of bias in the archaeological record. However, there are actually large numbers of visual artifacts in modern collections that were used by “ordinary” persons in antiquity. Among these are the most numerous and varied categories of Mesopotamian art: cylinder seals, clay plaques and figurines. None of these appear to have engaged with the memory of the Akkadians by representing the Akkadians.¹¹ That the Akkadians do not appear in these types of objects suggests that a bias in the archaeological

9 Some examples: the wall paintings of the Neo-Assyrian palace at the provincial settlement of Til Barsip (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936) echo the stone reliefs of the palaces in the imperial capitals; metal statues of kings are generally comparable to contemporary royal statues in stone, like those of the Akkadian period (Mallowan 1936); Old Babylonian metal figures of worshippers have terracotta parallels (Sollberger 1969).

10 Related to the problem of preservation is the deliberate destruction of images, a practice well-documented in ancient Mesopotamia (for references, see Feldman 2009: n. 21). However, unless there is visual or textual evidence for the destruction of an image, we cannot know of its existence. There is no evidence for the destruction of a posthumous image of an Akkadian king.

11 For the possibility that the memory of the Akkadians was addressed in indirect ways, see the next section.

record toward elite contexts may not explain the absence of posthumous images of the Akkadians.

If secondary factors are not to blame, then something within ancient Mesopotamia must have prevented the revisualization of the Akkadian past. In the sections that follow, I present three separate, but not mutually exclusive, reasons why this revisualization did not occur. Each concerns a different group of people involved in the production and consumption of images, as well as historical memory: “ordinary” people, scribes and artists, and kings. Their reasons for engaging with the Akkadian legacy differ, as do their reasons for abstaining from posthumously produced images of the Akkadian past.

Men and Gods

The existence of written literature and an oral tradition featuring the Akkadian kings raises the possibility that visual equivalents of the Akkadian literary narratives might be found among the artifacts of Mesopotamian popular visual culture. Although the subjects of Mesopotamian literature are rarely treated in the visual arts, there are images that feature literary episodes and characters (Steinkeller 1992; Green 1997; Selz 1998; and see Sonik, this volume). Most famously, episodes from the Gilgamesh tradition appear in terracotta plaques, cylinder seals, and stone reliefs (Fig. 2) (Steymans 2011). The earliest of these images coincide with the copying of the Sumerian Gilgamesh narratives onto tablets in the late third or early second millennium BCE, and it is likely that both images and texts are linked to a popular oral tradition (Lambert 1987). However, as noted above, images of the Akkadian kings do not appear among the seals, plaques, and figurines that represent popular visual culture. A consideration of the images from the Gilgamesh tradition suggests a reason why.

The two narrative episodes from the Sumerian Gilgamesh stories that appear in the early terracottas (Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven) are the same episodes that appear in Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals more than a thousand years later.¹² By that time, Gilgamesh’s story had been reformulated to include some of the older Sumerian episodes alongside newer Babylonian episodes. This editorial process shifted the focus of the narrative away from Gilgamesh’s super-human feats to his failed search for immortality (George 2003: 33). Yet the visualizations of his life in art continued to focus on the awesome feats of killing the monster Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. The selection of these episodes, and the exclusion of others, is linked to the magical function of the objects on which they appeared, beyond any narrative significance the episodes might have within the epic. Clay plaques served as beneficent and apotropaic

¹² The head of Humbaba, a synecdoche for the narrative episode in which he is killed, also appears alone in plaques, seals and architectural reliefs (Assante 2002a: 9; Assante 2002b: 28–29).



Figure 2: Terracotta plaque with a scene of Gilgamesh and Enkidu killing Humbaba. Old Babylonian period. Height: 8.1 cm, width 13.8 cm. Vorderasiatisches Museum 7246. Courtesy of BPK, Berlin/Vorderasiatisches Museum/Olaf M. Tessmer/Art Resource, NY.

devices (Assante 2002a: 6), and cylinder seals, despite modern focus on their administrative functions, were protective amulets (Collon 1987: 113). The extraordinary ability of Gilgamesh to overcome his divinely appointed enemies won him recognition in the literary narratives, and it won him the right to serve as a protective figure within popular religious practice.¹³

The episodes of the heroic king Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu slaying Humbaba and killing the Bull of Heaven are not so different in theme from aspects of the Akkadian literary narratives. Like Gilgamesh, the Akkadian kings were also remembered for awesome achievements, such as Naram-Sin's defeat of the hybrid bird-men raised by the monstrous goddess Tiamat (J. Westenholz 1997: 308–9), but the Akkadians differed from Gilgamesh in one key aspect: their humanity (J. Westenholz 1983: 335). Unlike Gilgamesh, whose divine parentage was a key component of his identity (George 2003: 106–08), legend had it that Sargon was born to a priestess and an unknown father (J. Westenholz 1997: 38–41), and Naram-Sin was the son of Sargon and a never-mentioned mother (J. Westenholz 1997: 300–01). Despite Naram-Sin's lifetime deification and the treatment of Akkadians as divine after the dynasty ended, the Akkadian kings did not join Gilgamesh in the pantheon of the gods. These

¹³ In a further example of Gilgamesh's magical power, exorcistic rituals refer to an image of Gilgamesh (George 2003: 133–34).

human kings would not have been capable of providing the same protection as an image of Gilgamesh, the divine judge of the Underworld.¹⁴ It may have been for this reason that images of the Akkadians' heroic accomplishments never found their way into the seals and plaques of popular culture.

Instead of an image of Sargon or Naram-Sin, the warrior aspect of Akkadian kingship is embraced more generically in the repertoire of apotropaic figures on plaques and seals. A "figure with mace" frequently appears on cylinder seals in the early second millennium BCE, and occasionally in terracotta plaques of the same date (Fig. 3). His short skirt with a distinctly-shaped hip-knot is similar to the garment worn by Naram-Sin in his stele found at Susa (Fig. 1), although the brimmed cap of the "figure with mace" matches the royal headdress of the late third and early second millennium BCE. Because of these two royal attributes, many have interpreted the figure as an emblem of divine kingship, although not to the point of identifying it as a representation of Naram-Sin (Moortgat 1940: 37–38; Porada 1948: 52; Collon 1986: 100–104). Certainly, the "figure with mace" projects a royal identity, but Wiggermann has argued that the figure, which he identifies as the protective *u du g/šedu* spirit, and Naram-Sin share these attributes because of their analogous actions and not because of a common identity (Wiggermann 1985–86: 25). The literary stories of the Akkadian kings as warriors in battle against supernatural creatures made Naram-Sin's dress a visual marker of extraordinary power, but Naram-Sin himself does not wear it in the artifacts of Mesopotamian popular religious culture.¹⁵

Scribes and Artists

Another reason why the literary compositions featuring the Akkadians were never visualized in images emerges from a consideration of the interests of the scribes who developed and circulated the compositions. Although the memory of the Akkadians was widespread, the written documents preserving the literary compositions belong to the world of scribes.¹⁶ Many of the exemplars are exercise tablets in which scribal

¹⁴ On Gilgamesh's life as a god, see George 2003: 119–35.

¹⁵ A fragmentary plaque from Isin with a standing figure resembling the statues of the Akkadian king Manishtushu may be another example of a post-Akkadian adoption of Akkadian dress (Hrouda 1992: pls. 45 and 47, IB 1859; for the statues of Manishtushu, see Eppihimer 2010). The articulated ribs and the folded and tucked waistband are distinctive features shared by the terracotta and the statues. Manishtushu's tasseled hem is missing from the plaque, however, and the hands and arms are differently positioned. In the statues, the hands are clasped at the waist; in the terracotta plaque, one arm rests at the side of the frontally positioned body, while the other is bent before the chest. This gesture and the colored paint on the terracotta lead Spycket (in Hrouda 1992: 57) to date it to the Kassite period (16th–12th centuries BCE). With its fragmentary condition it is not possible to argue for or against the idea that the plaque represents an Akkadian king.

¹⁶ On scribes in Mesopotamia, see Pearce 1995.

students were learning to write or displaying their accumulated expertise, and some of these tablets have been found in archaeological contexts associated with scribal training. Yet, scribal agency within the Akkadian literary legacy goes beyond the basic fact that we owe the written documents to scribes. In addition to using the narratives of the Akkadian legacy as practice material, scribes contributed to the form and historical content of the compositions through their knowledge of original Akkadian inscriptions, as discussed above. Moreover, some of the compositions draw attention to the significant roles performed by scribes in the preservation of memory, lending credence to the possibility that scribes also influenced the thematic content of the texts.

The idea that writing mediates between the past and the present is the central theme of the “Cuthaeen Legend of Naram-Sin” (J. Westenholz 1993; Michalowski 1999: 81–82), one of the most frequently attested literary compositions featuring the Akkadians (J. Westenholz 1997: no. 22). At the end of this pseudo-royal inscription, the role of the scribe in the mediation of the royal message is explicitly acknowledged when Naram-Sin intones for a reader/listener “Wise scribes, let them declaim your inscription” (J. Westenholz 1997: 330–1, lines 175–6).¹⁷ Additional emphasis on the scribal intermediary is manifest in the superstructure of the composition. At the start, there is a command for the reader or listener to “open the tablet box and read out the *narû*” of Naram-Sin held inside (J. Westenholz 1997: 300–1, lines 1–2). Thus, the audience of the “Cuthaeen Legend” is to imagine finding and reading an authentic Naram-Sin inscription. In reality, however, any discovery of the supposed Naram-Sin *narû* – the actual opening of the tablet box – must have been accomplished by someone else. The reader or listener only has access to a copy of the text made by a scribe. As a literary topos, then, the fake royal inscription, of which the “Cuthaeen Legend” is only one, albeit emphatic, example within the Akkadian literary legacy, activates a metadiscourse on writing in which the scribe is the preserver of posterity for the king.¹⁸ Seen in this light, the compositions that claim to be authentic inscriptions of the Akkadians and even those that mimic them can be regarded as celebrating the scribal profession, possibly in the hope of reminding royal patrons of the scribes’ service.¹⁹

17 A similar acknowledgment of a literate intermediary occurs in another genre of text that claimed to preserve the speech of ancient rulers: the royal letter. Here, the royal sender is also dependent upon the scribe to record and then read aloud his message to the recipient, as emphasized by the instruction “say to...” Two examples of this genre where Sargon of Akkad is the sender are J. Westenholz 1997: Nos. 10 and 11.

18 That our analysis of Mesopotamian literary texts should focus on the interests of scribes, not just the interests of kings, was suggested by Steinkeller (2006). A similar move in the realm of images occurs in Ataç’s (2010) study of the agency of priests and scribes in the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs, which are normally studied as the domain of the king and royal propaganda.

19 On the connections between scribes, kings, and *narû*-literature in the Neo-Babylonian period, see Beaulieu 2007: 140–42.



Figure 3: Terracotta plaque with the “figure with mace.” Old Babylonian period. Height 12.1 cm, width 7.1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art 32.39.2. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.

While not all of the compositions in the Akkadian literary legacy express the important role of scribes, the existence of some that do suggests a reason why these kinds of Akkadian literary narratives were not rendered in images. A faux royal inscription that communicates the importance of writing and scribes is perforce a textual phenomenon. Is there a visual equivalent of a pseudo-royal inscription? One

might envision a representation that emphasizes the process of making royal images, such as a representation of an artist carving a stele or relief within which a royal image is rendered. However, representations of artists are exceedingly rare in Mesopotamian art. Sculptors are depicted carving a royal stele and a rock relief at the source of the Tigris in Neo-Assyrian narrative scenes on bronze door bands (Harmanşah 2007: 194–95), but this visualization of the artist is embedded within an actual royal image, and thus any hint of self-awareness the artist may have inserted into the image is subordinated to an Assyrian royal agenda.

Even if we can imagine a kind of self-referential image, its production would be predicated upon a discourse of image-making comparable to the discourse of inscription-writing deployed by the scribes, but there is no evidence for the existence of such a discourse. Although the lives of Mesopotamian artists are less well understood than the lives of scribes, much can be learned from excavated workshops, archival documents, literary texts, and, of course, the products of the artists (Matthews 1995; Van de Mieroop 1997: 176–96).²⁰ The artists' expertise rested in the technical execution of the object, and language used to describe artists and their work had a vocabulary of mastery, skill, and affect (Winter 2002; 2003: 11–17). The most expertly made objects were not works of art in the modern sense, but works that performed their intended functions, among which was eliciting a response from the viewer or user. Most often, this meant adhering to established visual forms and following the demands of the patron. Letters from the Neo-Assyrian period attest to the fact that the patron, in this case the king, selected the formal qualities of the image (Winter 1995: 367), and style could reflect the royal patron's interests (Winter 1998: 67–70). The strong degree to which existing works of art adhere to visual conventions indicates that artists were not free to express their own ideas (Gates 1990: 32). Under these circumstances, the Mesopotamian artist may not have seen himself as responsible for the construction and dissemination of royal messages, and therefore a metadiscourse that foregrounds the role of the artist as a mediator between past and present, like the scribal one discussed above, never formed. In essence, the absence of visual parallels to the literary legacy of the Akkadians may be due to the fact that the conditions of the Mesopotamian artist did not allow him to harness the Akkadian legacy for social or political advantage.

20 I use the term “artist” even though no distinction was drawn between art and craft in Mesopotamia. Instead, those trained to work with stone, for example, were stoneworkers regardless of whether they produced statues, reliefs, seals, vases, or jewelry. Because I am interested in the production of images with representational content, “artist” is more useful than “craftsman” and more convenient than “image-maker.”

Kings and Exemplars of Kingship

Scribes were not the only persons who employed the memory of the Akkadians to their advantage. For rulers, the Akkadian kings were models of behavior to be followed or criticized, and the promotion of the Akkadian past or the suppression of it could have drawn attention to the current ruler's character. Along these lines, there have been attempts to read the literary compositions written about the Akkadians as reflecting the interests of post-Akkadian rulers (Liverani 1993; Tinney 1995). Despite the appeal of this scenario, there is actually little concrete evidence linking rulers to the texts. Some of the compositions were included in the Neo-Assyrian royal libraries (J. Westenholz 1997: 37, 296–97; Lewis 1980: 134), but the long histories of the compositions and their broader circulation beyond the libraries indicates that the Neo-Assyrian kings neither commissioned the texts nor controlled their dissemination.²¹ Although rulers may have promoted the literary compositions in scribal schools and among the priesthood as a means to inculcate among these literate classes an ideology compatible with royal ideology (Cooper 1993: 16), it would seem that a ruler who wished to engage the legacy of Akkadian kingship to draw attention to his own royal persona would seek other, more controllable ways of doing so. The Neo-Babylonian kings, for whom the Akkadians were models of royal power (Beaulieu 1989: 44), sought out artifacts of the Akkadian past for this purpose. Could they or other rulers have also ordered the production of posthumous images of the Akkadians to draw connections between the past and the present?

Art with historical content was an important form of visual communication and legitimization for Mesopotamian kings (Moscato 1963). The extant examples of Mesopotamian historical art, however, generally depict persons and events from the lifetime of the person who commissioned the work.²² Researchers have been led to this conclusion by inscriptions that attribute the ownership and production of the image to the person depicted therein, but it is worth considering whether any historical images were produced as posthumous honors, like some Roman imperial monuments. In the Arch of Titus and the Column of Marcus Aurelius, for example, visual narratives featuring deceased actors were used by imperial successors to fortify their claims to rule (Davies 2000). For similar examples within Mesopotamia, we might look to the Neo-Assyrian period, when historical narrative was widely used (Winter 1981; Pittman 1996). Perhaps among the narrative reliefs and wall paintings of the Neo-Assyrian palaces is a posthumous recognition of a royal predecessor's accomplishment.²³ Until

21 One chronicle referring to Sargon of Akkad may actually contain a veiled critique of the Neo-Assyrian Sargon II (Van de Mieroop 1999a: 334–39).

22 Depending upon how its imagery is interpreted, the “Stele of the Vultures” of Eannatum of Lagash may depict events preceding Eannatum's reign (Winter 1985: 20).

23 It has been suggested that representations of royal ancestors appear among the Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) palace reliefs, but these do not include the historical narratives. In the case of the

we rule out this possibility, we cannot say with certainty that the Neo-Assyrians never used images to commemorate the actions of historical persons after their death. By extension, we cannot say that posthumous images would never have commemorated the lives of Sargon and Naram-Sin.

Yet there is one aspect of Mesopotamian image-making that would have made posthumous commemorative images of the Akkadians difficult to produce. In Mesopotamia, images (*alān/šalmu*) were manifestations and not simply representations of the persons they depicted (Bonatz 2002; Bahrani 2003: 121–48). Thus, a posthumously produced image of an Akkadian king would be his manifest presence. The capacity of an image to make manifest the dead was known in Mesopotamia, but it appears to have been restricted to circumstances where there was a clear and meaningful connection between the image and the deceased. For example, a deceased person could be present in the votive statues that were erected during his lifetime; these received offerings after their donor's death in recognition of their continued existence as his manifestation (Kobayashi 1984).²⁴ Such statues are distinct from the images of the dead that were part of funerary rituals. In funerary rituals, the spirit of the deceased (*eṭemmu*) temporarily occupied an image produced specifically for the funerary realm as the spirit journeyed to the underworld (Scurlock 2002; Katz 2003: 201–12).²⁵ If that spirit failed to find comfort in the afterlife and instead continued to haunt the living, a figurine could be produced in order to reinter the wandering spirit in the Netherworld (Scurlock 2006: 49–56).

Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, posthumous images were erected in conjunction with an honorific cult of the dead (Bonatz 2005). The evidence for this practice in Mesopotamia, however, is quite weak. Old Babylonian references to images of kings dedicated by their sons and successors seem to imply the posthumous production of images, but in most cases it is not clear that the images were posthumous productions, rather than restorations or rededications of existing

throne room reliefs B-23 and B-13 discussed by Brentjes (1994: 54–55), the figures are said to be the father and grandfather of the king. Brown (2010: 10–12, 34) argues that in Room H the royal figures are ten ancestor kings from the reigning dynasty. For both Brentjes and Brown, differences in attributes and dress, and not portraiture, indicate the presence of different ancestor kings. It remains to be seen whether similar differences in the narrative reliefs might enable us to distinguish between images of the living ruler who commissioned the reliefs and images of his predecessors.

24 The strong curses protecting against the destruction of the statue can be interpreted as a sign that a posthumous replacement for a statue was unlikely.

25 The most detailed description of this type of image appears in the Gilgamesh epic (George 2003: 656–7, tablet VIII, lines 67–72). The fate of Enkidu's posthumous image is not preserved in the text, but given the abhorrence of objects associated with the death, it may have been interred with the body (Scurlock 2002: 2). In its literary context, Enkidu's image takes on significant narrative value as part of Gilgamesh's engagement with death and his search for immortality. On this and the futility of the funerary statue as a memorial, see Dickson 2009: 39–44.

works.²⁶ The Harran steles erected by the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (555–539 BCE) with what may be an image of his deceased mother Adad-Guppi and the stele with an image of Assur-šarrat, wife of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE), in the *Stelenreihe* at Assur are candidates for posthumous images, but in fact the steles reflect Syro-Hittite cultural practices (Bonatz 2005: 139–40). Similarly, Syro-Hittite funerary practices may have encouraged the inclusion of images of ancestor kings in the palace of Assurnasirpal II (Brown 2010: 17–20).

In the kinds of images that were accepted in Mesopotamia as manifestations of the dead, the representation has a connection to the deceased, whether as an enduring manifestation from his lifetime, as a temporary or permanent locus for his spirit, or, in the first-millennium BCE cases influenced by a foreign tradition, through the familial link of a descendant. Throughout most of Mesopotamian history, this kind of connection – what Bahrani (2003: 132) calls “contiguity” – would have been difficult, if not impossible to establish with the long-dead Akkadian kings. For Shamshi-Adad, who claimed an ancestral connection to the kings of Akkad in the early part of the second millennium BCE, the premise of a familial tie may have been sufficient for him to have produced images of Sargon and Naram-Sin to include in his ancestor cult rituals, if those mentioned in the Mari text were not original images from the Akkadian period.²⁷ For most others, though, posthumous revisualizations of the Akkadian kings could not have been legitimate manifestations of their subjects without contiguity. In other words, they would have lacked ontological authenticity.²⁸ For rulers wishing to utilize the memory of the Akkadians kings to their advantage, then, to produce a commemorative monument depicting the Akkadian kings would have required disregarding the cultural norms and rituals of representation.

The literary compositions featuring the Akkadians did not face the same problem of needing to establish ontological authenticity. Despite their similarities to Akkadian royal inscriptions, and the fact that some even claim to be Akkadian royal inscrip-

26 For the Old Babylonian sources, most of which are year-names, see Radner 2005: 126, n. 667. Note particularly that the statue of Nur-Adad of Larsa produced by his son Sin-iddinam appears to have been made while Nur-Adad was still living (Fitzgerald 2002: 93).

27 Alternatively, the images may have been subject to the laws related to divine images. In the Mari text, the names of the two Akkadian kings are not preceded by the divine determinative that would indicate divinity, but their representations are identified by the term *lamassu*, which has associations with the divine. On the term in this context, see Birot 1980: 146–7.

28 Bonatz (2002: 16–17) argues that because the Assyrian kings never referred to their palace reliefs as *šalmu* they regarded them as historical reports, rather than manifestations. If so, then a posthumous narrative image of the Akkadians could likewise be regarded as a historical report and thereby escape the manifestation component of the *šalmu*. The various alternative terms used by the Assyrians to refer to aspects of representation, however, are not mutually exclusive nor do they refer to the entirety of a monument’s content. As even Bonatz (2002: 11–12) notes, a *šalmu* may be part of a larger monument such as a *narû*. Thus there may be *šalmu*s within the narrative reliefs called by other names in the Assyrian royal inscriptions.

tions, the literary compositions were not actual Akkadian royal inscriptions and were not treated as such. Indeed, many scholars believe that the inscriptions composed in the style of an Akkadian royal inscription were not meant to deceive the audience into accepting the authenticity of the text (Oppenheim 1977: 258; Jonker 1995: 95). The artifice of the compositions seems to be part of their value, and this aspect was preserved as long as the text was operating on a conceptual rather than physical level. In general, the posthumously invented Akkadian inscriptions, whether produced and used in the scribal school or catalogued and stored among literary, historiographic, and scientific texts in a royal library, assumed a physical form only as a means of fixing the linguistic message.²⁹

One example of a post-Akkadian *narû* inscription, however, demonstrates that when that message moved from the literary realm of artifice into the artifactual realm of authenticity by acquiring objecthood, it could be used by the king to promote a connection with the past. The object known today as the Cruciform Monument was found encased in bricks alongside two royal inscriptions of Nabonidus in the temple of Shamash at Sippar (Letter of Hormuzd Rassam, cited in Sollberger 1967–68: 53) (Fig. 4). The Cruciform Monument contains an inscription that resembles in form and content an Akkadian royal inscription. To a trained eye, however, this Akkadian “monument” is obviously not a product of the Akkadian period. Although it tries to reproduce the lapidary script and phraseology of Akkadian royal inscriptions, post-Akkadian features in the inscription betray the fact that the Cruciform Monument was produced no earlier than the Old Babylonian period (Gelb 1949; Sollberger 1967–68). Unfortunately, it is not certain when exactly this artifact was produced, or by whom or for what purposes.³⁰ Likewise, it is hard to determine whether Nabonidus knew that the monument was post-Akkadian or whether he genuinely believed that it was an Akkadian artifact. Nabonidus’ degree of awareness, however, matters little when it comes to interpreting his behavior towards the object. Nabonidus buried the Cruciform Monument in his temple deposit to show his adherence to royal precedent and religious tradition. He was only able to demonstrate this aspect of his character because the allegedly ancient precedent was physically present in the form of an artifact with a monumental material and a distinctive shape. For Nabonidus’ purposes,

²⁹ For Neo-Assyrian sources attesting to the importance of textual content rather than its medium in the building of the library of Assurbanipal, see Charpin 2010: 197–98.

³⁰ Several clay tablets appear to represent a sequence leading from original Akkadian sources to intermediate versions written on tablets and ultimately to the text of the Cruciform Monument (Sollberger 1967–68; al-Rawi and George 1994), but the exact circumstances of the production of the artifact remain unknown. One of the tablets names Manishtushu (al-Rawi and George 1994), which on the surface disproves Powell’s (1991) interpretation of the Cruciform Monument as the Naram-Sin foundation inscription Nabonidus claims to have found and deposited alongside his own inscription. However, it is entirely possible that the name appeared as Naram-Sin in the stone’s version of the inscription, or that Nabonidus overlooked or ignored the specific name on the stone.

however genuine or manipulative, a scribe's clay tablet with a copy of a (real or invented) Akkadian royal inscription would not have been as effective.³¹

Tangible exemplars of ancient images were also central to the antiquarianism of the Babylonian kings in the first millennium BCE. Visual artifacts recovered from the ground often became prototypes for historically and divinely sanctioned religious images, including a stele of the earlier Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104 BCE) that became the basis for a Nabonidus stele with an image of a priestess (Reiner 1985: 11–12), a cylinder seal of the Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal that Nabonidus used to create an image of the moon-god Sin (Lee 1993: 135–36), and a clay mold with an image of the sun-god Shamash that Nabu-apla-iddina (ninth century BCE) used to restore that god's cult image (Woods 2004). Slightly different are the cases where the ancient image prompted the king to produce his own royal image in imitation of an ancient precedent, but not necessarily in imitation of its visual form. Nabopolassar (625–605 BCE) deposited his image alongside the image of an ancient king in the wall of Babylon (al-Rawi 1985: column iii, lines 16–21), and Nabonidus erected his statue in response to the discovery of an image of Sargon of Akkad (Beaulieu 1989: 134–35). In all of these examples, the relationship between past and present was established by juxtaposing old and new.

Given the existence of the Cruciform Monument, a pseudo-Akkadian artifact, and the potential of royal narratives to obscure the truth, however, one must ask whether all of these alleged antiquities were authentic ancient images, or whether some could have been Neo-Babylonian creations. If there are signs of fabrication, then it would seem that there were persons willing to challenge the conventions of representation. Physical evidence relating to these accounts is limited to the case of the “Sun-God tablet” of Nabu-apla-iddina, and there the evidence is indirect and inconclusive.³² With little physical evidence to consider, we are left with only the royal accounts of the images and their discoveries, through which it is difficult to access actual behavior rather than rhetoric. Yet, the reported behavior exposes what were thought to be the

31 Some of the literary compositions written about the Akkadians appear on prisms, rather than tablets (J. Westenholz 1997: nos. 14 and 21A). This form can be used for both scribal training and finished royal inscriptions like those used in foundation deposits. As such, it is possible that these examples acquired a degree of objecthood that permitted them, like the Cruciform Monument, to be treated like authentic Akkadian inscriptions. The prism from Larsa (no. 14) was found inside a temple, and the prism from Boğazköy (no. 21A) was found in the vicinity of a temple; the context may be significant in this regard.

32 This stone object offers a depiction of the new cult statue of Shamash alongside an account of the discovery of the ancient image of Shamash. The alleged ancient prototype of the new image is not rendered. The archaizing depiction of Shamash on the tablet is an amalgam of late third and early second millennium BCE iconography and types (Woods 2004: 53–58). Winter reads this as a sign that Nabu-apla-iddina used an ancient image as a prototype (2000: 1791), but Woods (2004: 59) implies that anachronisms “belie the image's claim to great antiquity.” Both may be correct: the ancient prototype may have been modified by the Neo-Babylonians to further archaize the image.



Figure 4: The “Cruciform Monument” found at Sippar. Old Babylonian period or later. Height 21.3 cm, width 11 cm. British Museum 91022. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

ideal conditions surrounding the treatment of images. In the case of the image of Sargon said to have been found by Nabonidus, the image was not only found, but was repaired and put on display. According to the chronicle that records this occasion, upon finding a damaged image of the Akkadian king – its face had been destroyed – Nabonidus called upon craftsmen to restore it and then established regular offerings

for it.³³ In this way, Nabonidus handles the image as if it were a manifestation of Sargon needing to be mended. It is possible that Nabonidus or the Sippar priests transformed a nameless and faceless artifact into a representation of Sargon (Powell 1991: 26).³⁴ However, the account stresses that the found artifact was already a *šalmu* (whether of Sargon or not) that needed to be repaired, not conjured from nothing. Therefore, Nabonidus avoids the appearance of posthumous image-making outside the confines of contiguity; instead, his behavior is presented as a revitalization of an ancient image. This account supports the idea that the posthumous production of images was meant to occur under conditions that could guarantee an authentic manifestation of the deceased.

Conclusion

In the preceding discussion, I have explored reasons that might explain the absence of posthumous representations of the Akkadian kings from Mesopotamian art. Having done so, I am not optimistic that we will one day uncover one or more images comparable to the literary renarrations of Akkadian kingship or another kind of posthumous image of the Akkadian kings. But even if this kind of image-making was prohibited, or if popular visual culture did not embrace the Akkadians as heroes, or if artists never developed a self-consciousness of their role as makers and keepers of historical memory, or if rulers elected to focus on their own achievements, there were ways that images could be used to invoke the memory of the Akkadian kings. With Akkadian statues and steles still visible in temples, these manifestations of the deceased could have been integrated into spectacular performances staging history for the audience (Van de Mieroop 1999b: 84). Through the physical juxtaposition of contemporary and ancient monuments, comparisons could have been drawn between kings of the present and kings of the past. This kind of inter-image dialogue is more subtle than a posthumous monument depicting the Akkadians outright. We should not view the absence of posthumous images of the Akkadians or any other significant figure in Mesopotamian history as a failure of Mesopotamian art to confront history. Instead, we should acknowledge the creative ways that historical consciousness was rendered in and across Mesopotamian images.

³³ The text refers to the statue as a *šalmu*, so it is not clear whether this refers to a relief image, a statue, or a foundation figure (Winter 2000: 1789, n. 3). Temple records affirm that an image of Sargon received offerings during Nabonidus' reign (Kennedy 1969: 79). This may very well be the statue "restored" by Nabonidus; from the written records it is not possible to establish the age of the image.

³⁴ If that is the case, it is unlikely that those who would have seen this image in the temple would have been familiar enough with Akkadian art to make a determination as to its authenticity.

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Styles of Pictorial Narratives in Assurbanipal's Reliefs

Abstract: This paper analyzes different styles of presenting pictorial narratives in Assurbanipal's reliefs. Two distinctive compositional arrangements, "linear arrangement" and "centric arrangement," are focused on in order to elucidate their features in depicting narratives from the point of view of the time and place at which the represented events occurred. A close examination of the centric arrangement as applied to the lion hunt reliefs on the southwest wall of Room C of the North Palace at Nineveh reveals that the hunting scenes incorporate two different hunts which would have been carried out at different times and possibly in different places. A similar practice of pictorial integration is also observed on the relief showing the presentation scene after the fall of Babylon. This includes not only a depiction of a parade of war spoils removed from the Babylonian palace, but also shows four foreigners lined up in front of Assurbanipal in a posture of supplication or of paying homage to the Assyrian king. The simultaneous occurrence of these events is not, however, supported by textual evidence. The centric arrangement is characterized by its potential to combine multiple incidents within a manipulated visual framework that creates a new dimension of historical events. This feature may already have been known at the time of Assurnasirpal II, when symmetrically-arranged reliefs were created to adorn the wall of the throneroom of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud.

Keywords: Pictorial narrative, compositional arrangement, linear arrangement, symmetry, continuous style

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Introduction: Interpretation Through Original Contexts

The themes of the bas-reliefs that once decorated the walls of Neo-Assyrian palaces range from military campaigns and the royal hunt to tributary scenes and undertaking construction, all of which were regarded as major accomplishments of the king to mark his reign. Each scene represents an important event that was intended to construct an official image of the empire in the viewer's mind. Assyrian palace reliefs convey clear political messages and, in order to achieve their function as visual

media, the compositional arrangement was carefully chosen and applied to each scene in order to fulfill its role as a strategic device. From the time of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE), who made extensive use of bas-reliefs in Assyria for the first time when adorning the walls of the major rooms of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, the methods and skills of narrative representation grew and developed. By the time of Assurbanipal (668–c. 631 BCE), narrative representation attained a high level of sophistication, simultaneously becoming extremely complex.

The styles of pictorial narratives can provide insights into visual thought processes that were not explained explicitly in written sources. Because certain thought processes were shared within a community as a “norm,” or common knowledge, they were originally transferred from generation to generation by oral tradition. Thus there was no need to write down these thought processes at the time when they were in circulation among the population. Viewers of Assyrian art today, however, are obliged to start by constructing a basis of understanding on which to interpret ancient iconography that was created with contemporary common knowledge of an ancient society. Our cultural backgrounds are naturally so different from that of the ancient Assyrians that we do not share the same criteria. When we interpret iconographic representations, we must always consider, therefore, how to avoid a projection of our own modern cultural values upon a culture of different origin. If we are unaware of the risk of our own cultural bias created by our own native cultural background, which has been formed under particular circumstances, it inevitably results in imposing an inappropriate interpretation on the cultural affairs of the ancients.

It is true, however, that history has been constantly subject to re-evaluation in accordance with cultural and political values at the time of interpretation. We are also handicapped by the fact that the artifacts which are currently available represent only the results of excavations carried out so far; there are vast numbers of sites still to be excavated, the outcome of which may force us to change and correct our view of the past. Yet an attempt can be made to understand the meaning as close as possible to its original understanding by examining an ancient object strictly in its original context. The most sensible approach seems to be to examine an object carefully in order to clarify what is actually represented, without imposing or reflecting any externally-derived values and perceptions, so that we may be able to achieve a better understanding of the original thoughts and intentions conveyed by the artifacts.

The aim of this contribution is to elucidate the visual effects peculiar to the compositional arrangement used in Assurbanipal’s reliefs, and to understand the methods of pictorial narratives from a point of view of the time and place in which the represented events took place. In particular, scenes in which the same figure is arranged symmetrically, as if a duplicate within a single space, are focused on. A careful observation of the scenes showing Assurbanipal hunting lions is undertaken in order to reveal a new aspect of the principle that was used for the basis of visual composition at that time. The term “centric arrangement” is introduced in order to

describe this particular composition, as opposed to “linear arrangement.”¹ These two distinctive compositional arrangements were used in the Assurbanipal reliefs to present significant scenes within the scheme of pictorial narrative.

Linear Arrangement

The linear arrangement was first noted by Unger (1933: 127–33), who described the style as *kinematographische Erzählungsform*. It was discussed later by Reade (1979: 106–109), who called it the *strip-cartoon effect*. The current author (Watanabe 2004: 103–14) interpreted it from the point of view of methods of presenting pictorial narratives delineated by Wickhoff in aesthetics. This compositional arrangement belongs to the category of “continuous style” (*kontinuierende Stil*), which Wickhoff (1912: 30) defines as one of the three major forms of presenting pictorial narratives.² This style presents successive narrative development by repeating the same figure who plays the central role in a story to show how a story evolved. Narrative development creates visual flow in a scene, which viewers follow to “read” the stories. The earliest example of this arrangement goes back to the late thirteenth century BCE when Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BCE) was represented facing an altar on the right of the scene. The king appears twice in a posture of worship: on the left-most representation he is standing, while on the right he is kneeling down. It is generally assumed that the scene shows the two stages of worship, in which the king first approaches the altar from the left and then kneels down.³

Lion Hunt Reliefs (Rooms S and S¹)

A typical example of this style in Assurbanipal reliefs is found in the king's lion hunt scenes from Rooms S and S¹ of the North Palace at Nineveh,⁴ in which different moments of action of the same lion are captured in order to show different stages of the hunt (Fig. 1). The scene appears in the upper register of a slab that is divided into three horizontal registers, in which the story consists of four units of representation: 1) a lion is released from a cage, 2) a lion is shot with an arrow as it is dashing forward, 3) a lion is jumping towards the king, who is about to shoot an arrow, and 4) a lion is

¹ The author is indebted to the following studies that deserve special mention: Albenda 1972, 1992; Lumsden 2004; Pittman 1996; Reade 1979, 1980a, 1980b; Russell 1987, 1993; Winter 1981, 1983, 1997.

² Weitzmann (1947: 12–36) later renamed this style as the “cyclic” method of representation.

³ The scene is depicted on a cultic pedestal. For an illustration, see Orthmann 1975: fig. 195.

⁴ For Room S reliefs, see Barnett 1976: plates XLVI–XLVII (original drawings) and plates XLIX–LII (photographs); and for Room S¹ reliefs, see Barnett 1976: plates LVI (original drawings) and plates LVII–LIX.

stabbed to death with a dagger by the king. These continuous episodes are arranged in the scene facing in one direction moving from right to left.

The Battle of Til-Tuba

Another example is found in the representation of the battle of Til-Tuba (Fig. 2). The fate of the Elamite king, Teumman, is depicted in seven units in the scene, each focusing on a crucial moment of the evolution of the story. The scene is to be read from left to right first on the upper register of the relief, where the flight of the wounded enemy king and his son is depicted only to result ultimately in their capture and beheading by the Assyrian soldiers. Then the direction of the story makes a large U-turn to the right of the scene and continues from right to left, with the severed head of Teumman and that of his son, Tammарitu, being held by soldiers and carried through the battlefield. Then it goes back to the upper register moving from right to left of the scene, where both heads are identified by hostages or allied Elamites. Finally, the head of Teumman is being driven to Assyria to the king, Assurbanipal, who awaits the good news. Thus a series of continuous episodes concerning the fate of the Elamite king and his son is arranged to develop in a particular direction that creates a flow which the viewers are invited to follow to read the story visually. It is noteworthy in this relief that a “narrative signal” is effectively used to guide the viewers’ eyes to the next episode (discussed below). The features attributed to this linear arrangement can be summarized as the achievement of realistic effectiveness by showing the details of a story that develops step by step in a concrete and descriptive manner. The viewers follow the evolution of the story with a sense of being involved in the events taking place in the scene.⁵

The representation of the battle of Til-Tuba was regarded by Kaelin (1999) as having been inspired by Egyptian art. He argued that some innovative features observed in this Assyrian relief can be identified as being due to the influence of the Egyptian reliefs representing the battle of Qadesh from the time of Ramses II. Kaelin divided these innovative features into two categories: “pictorial elements” (*Bildelemente*) and the structure of “story explanation” (*Bilderzählung*). In discussing particular motifs (“pictorial elements”) occurring in the reliefs of the battle of Til-Tuba, such as the depictions of horses crisscrossing each other and of Assyrian order in contrast with the chaos represented by the enemy forces, Kaelin argued that these are totally new in Assyrian art. He argued that some features – such as too many historical details presented without chronological links from one scene to the other resulting in difficulty reading the story (though see below) – were outside the scope of Assyrian

⁵ This feature is expressed by Wickhoff in his discussion on Trajan’s Column (Wickhoff 1912: 169); cf. Clausberg 1984: 29–40. See Watanabe 2004 and 2006 for further discussion.



Figure 1: The king's lion hunt scenes from Room S¹, the North Palace, Nineveh (upper register). After Barnett 1976: plate LVI, Original Drawing V 4; reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

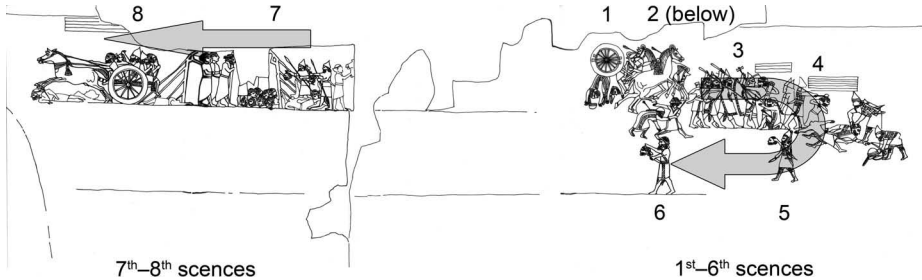


Figure 2: The Battle of Til-Tuba: the sequence of the narratives. Drawing made by the author.

tradition. He concluded that these features are the result of Egyptian influence, particularly since all these unique pictorial elements, as well as the compositional structure, can be identified in the Egyptian representation of the battle of Qadesh. The hypothesis presented by Kaelin is that the Egyptian masterpiece was seen when Assurbanipal's troops invaded Egypt and occupied Thebes in 663 BCE, and the new form of representation was adopted for the Assyrian account of the battle of Til-Tuba. Kaelin's study revealed remarkable similarity between the two representations, and it is highly likely that the artists accompanying the Assyrian troops would have seen the Egyptian masterpiece during the Egyptian campaign and would have recorded events visually with a view to producing their own palace reliefs later. The encounter with Egyptian art provided a new artistic dimension that depicts a panoramic view of battle, perhaps following on the development of the "bird's-eye" view that appears in the reigns of Sargon and Sennacherib (Russell 1991: 198–202). This was assimilated and incorporated into the Assyrian method of rendering the recession of space by means of vertical perspective.

The present author, however, re-examined both reliefs from the point of view of the narrative method of representation and identified a new aspect showing that there is a clear difference between the two, which has been overlooked previously (Watanabe 2008). Namely, the Egyptian relief is represented in a style in which all incidents important to the storyline are presented in their entirety, regardless of the time-scale of the event, thus combining multiple moments of the story in the same picture without providing the viewers with a clue to the story sequence. This type of represen-

tation is categorized as the “complete style” (*komplettierende Stil*) by Wickhoff, or the “simultaneous method” by Weitzmann.⁶ The viewer needs to know the story in advance or to be guided by a storyteller in order to make sense of the pictorial representations, because no chronological guidance is given and viewers are left to work out the development of the story within simultaneously presented scenes by themselves.

The Assyrian battle of Til-Tuba, however, is a clear example of the “continuous style,” in which the sequence of the narrative is indicated not only by the movement of the protagonists but also by “narrative signals,” which specify a particular direction by means of postures and gestures (Watanabe 2004: 109–11). By placing a “narrative signal” in a significant corner of the scene, the viewers are guided to follow and “read” the story without knowing the account in advance nor being told by somebody else what is represented in the scene. Assyrian artists achieved this unique method of representation by establishing a close network of narrative links that makes the important episode stand out from the crammed background, here depicting the turmoil of battle. The Assyrian linear arrangement thus reached its peak at the representation of the battle of Til-Tuba, and the principles adopted by this relief clearly argue against mere experimentation or replication under Egyptian influence.

Centric Arrangement

The other compositional scheme, centric arrangement, is determined by symmetrical visual flows that face each other and are directed towards the center of the scene. A typical example is a symmetrical arrangement often used in ornamental patterns. Albenda (1992) analyzed symmetrical methods of representation in Assyrian art, defining three types of symmetry: 1) reflection symmetry, 2) rotation symmetry, and 3) the combination of rotation and reflection symmetries. Reflection symmetry is an arrangement in which motifs can be divided into two equal halves along a central vertical axis to create “mirror imagery.”⁷ Two kneeling genies, represented in an upper register of a relief originally from Room I of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, which is now housed in the Brooklyn Museum, are represented in mirror imagery, where the left-hand genie raises his left arm but the right-hand genie lifts his right arm,⁸ thus the two images are duplicated and are strictly reflected.

Rotation symmetry, however, creates symmetrical imagery by turning a figure laterally around a vertical axis in the center. This symmetrical arrangement is made

⁶ Wickhoff 1912: 30; Weitzmann 1947: 12–36. Cf. Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999: 1–4.

⁷ The use of this arrangement is common in ornamental patterns, and it is occasionally seen also in the representation of human figures.

⁸ See Albenda 1992: fig. 3, upper register (Brooklyn Museum 55146).

by rotating the figure 180 degrees. In an example shown in the lower register of the same relief, an eagle-headed genie on the left shows the right side of his body and the one on the right displays the left side of his body instead of simply showing a mirror image.⁹ In this example, both eagle-headed genies lift their right hands, which grasp a cone-shaped object, and their left hands are lowered to hold a small bucket. Their heads and their legs below the knee, however, are depicted in mirror imagery so that these genies are the product of a combination of reflection and rotation symmetries. This type of combined arrangement seems to appear more commonly in Assyrian symmetrical representation in general.

The Assyrian king appears occasionally in the scheme of symmetrical arrangement, where he is depicted twice, with each representation facing the other in a scene. The oldest available example of this type in Assyrian palace reliefs comes from the time of Assurnasirpal II. The king appears twice facing a sacred tree (Fig. 3). The winged disk is depicted above the sacred tree, and in the middle of the disk appears a deity whose upper body faces to the right, responding to the king who stands facing the center in a posture of worship. The figures of the king are further flanked by human-headed winged genies who both face the center of the scene in a posture of perhaps performing a purification ritual. There are two reliefs executed in this style, which are almost duplicates, from the throneroom panels, each occupying a significant location in the visual scheme of the throneroom.¹⁰

There are other similar depictions of Assyrian kings flanking sacred entities. A glazed brick façade of Shalmanesser III shows a sacred tree on the upper part in the center and a winged disk below. The king stands on either side of the disk in a posture of worship.¹¹ This representation shows close similarities to the relief of Assurnasirpal II with variations in the location of the sacred tree that is also flanked by a pair of rampant bulls, and this design occupies the entire upper half of the arched façade, being placed above the winged disk that stretches its wings wide over the figures of the king, as if the king is under the protection of the “shadow” (*ina šilli*) of the divine wings. The two figures of the king appear below the wings, directly facing each other. The scene is encircled decoratively by plant motifs of palmette, rosette and pomegranate, as well as guilloche (intertwining lines) and goats. The arched shape of the framework indicates the monumental nature of this panel and, despite the presence of some changes in composition, the represented theme seems to be very closely associated with that of the Throne Room relief of Assurnasirpal II.

⁹ See Albenda 1992: fig. 3, lower register (Brooklyn Museum 55146).

¹⁰ See Orthmann 1975: fig. 198. For studies of reliefs in the Throne Room, see Winter 1981, 1983; Lumsden 2004. Winter (1981: 10–11) discusses the effect of symmetrical composition at the intellectual, conceptual, and physiological/psychological levels.

¹¹ See Reade 1963: 38–47; Orthmann 1975: plate XIX and pp. 316–17.



Figure 3: Relief of Assurnasirpal II flanking the sacred tree and the winged disk (BM ME 124531), from Room B, the Northwest Palace, Nimrud. The British Museum. Photograph taken by the author; reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Rock reliefs carved at Bavian¹² from the time of Sennacherib presents the figure of the king on the left- and right-hand sides of two deities who are also facing one another; both figures of the king are in a posture of worship facing the deities. At Maltaï, multiple representations of a scene showing a divine procession are executed on a rock relief¹³ also from the time of Sennacherib, in which the king appears twice in each scene, standing in front of a procession of seven deities, as well as at the end of the procession, in a posture of worship. In these examples, the visual flow created by the posture of the human and divine participants is always directed towards the center of the scene, except for the last Maltaï examples in which the divine procession faces one direction (to the left). Thus the “center” is not physically in the middle of the scene, but instead the focal point is created between the first deity in the procession and the figure of the king who turns to face the divine procession.

Assurbanipal Lion Hunt Scenes (Room C)

A rare occurrence of symmetrical arrangement applied to the lion hunt scene is found on reliefs that once decorated the southwest wall of Room C of the North Palace,

¹² See Bachmann 1927 for illustrations; Oman 2007: 177, fig. 2.

¹³ See Boehmer 1975: 58–82 for illustrations.

Assurbanipal's palace at Nineveh (Fig. 4). The sculptures are now housed in the British Museum, and show two royal chariots dashing towards each other, in which Assurbanipal stands in the rear of the chariot facing backwards and slaying a lion.¹⁴ The two chariots are about to crash into each other in a head-on collision. The presence of a rampant lion in the middle of the two chariots, however, functions as a visual buffer to absorb confronting flows created by strong centric movements. It is difficult to make sense of this scene from the point of view of time and space in reality. The figure of Assurbanipal is represented twice in the scene, in each case riding in a chariot, and the arrangement of major motifs in the scene is symmetrical. However, there are many differences in details between the left- and right-hand sides of this scene. A major difference appears in the weapon used by the king. On the left of the scene, it is a sword, which he thrusts into the throat of a lion, and that used on the right is a lance, with which he pierces the neck of another lion.

The opposite, northeast, wall of Room C was also decorated with reliefs of a lion hunt taking place in an enclosed arena.¹⁵ To the left of the hunting scene, there is a depiction of preparation, showing the king in a chariot receiving his bow and arrows prior to the hunt. This is followed by a scene showing a round hill, which spectators climb in order to watch the hunt. The hunting arena is guarded by two rows of armed soldiers with additional guards holding hounds in front of them. The king stands in a chariot and faces in the direction of travel to shoot an arrow at lions. The arena is closed by another row of soldiers on the right-hand side of the scene on the southeast wall. The scene showing the hunt in the arena seems to end here. There is a gap in the surviving reliefs in the corner between the southeast wall and the southwest wall which seems to have formed a doorway leading to central Courtyard J.¹⁶ Weissert (1997: 344–45) has interpreted the scene on the northeast wall as representing a particular royal hunt recorded in the text K6085, which states: “with a single team, my lordly team, [(harnessed to) my royal vehicle], forty minutes after daybreak, I made the fury of 18 raging lions calm down” (K6085: lines 5’–6’b). He further suggests that the 18 lions killed in the Nineveh arena were to symbolically secure the 18 gates of the city wall surrounding Nineveh (Weissert 1997: 351–56). A clear difference between the representation of the hunting scene depicted on the northeast wall (the arena scene) and that on the southwest wall (the symmetrical arrangement) is that the former is carried out inside an enclosed arena whereas the latter depicts no enclosures, though a part of the reliefs has not survived which leaves some uncertainty. We are left with the question of whether the hunt represented on each wall was performed on two different occasions: one inside the arena and the

¹⁴ Barnett 1976: plates XI–XII (slabs 20–25).

¹⁵ Barnett 1976: plates VII–VIII (slabs 10–15).

¹⁶ Central Courtyard J was located in the main residential area of the Palace. See Barnett 1976: 28–33 for Geoffrey Turner's architectural reconstruction.

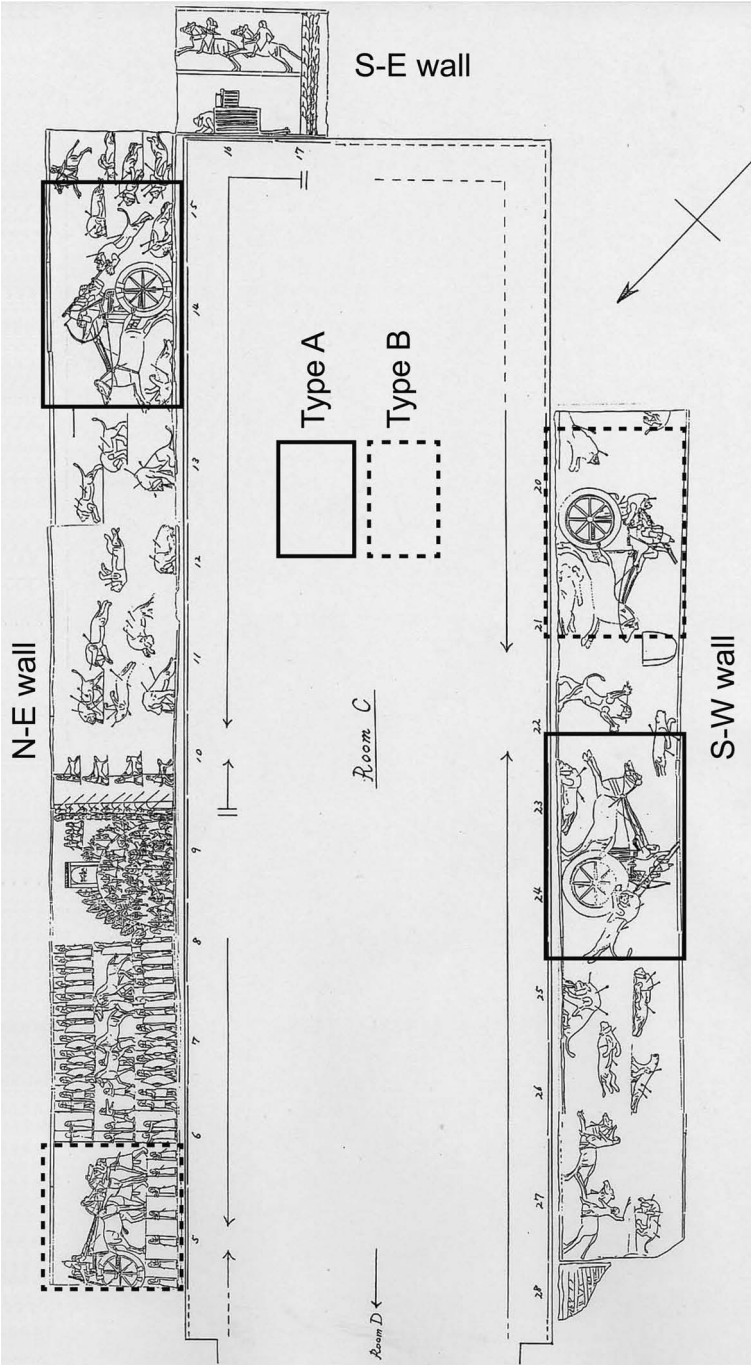


Figure 4: Assurbanipal's lion hunt scenes: plan of Room C of the North Palace in Nineveh. Drawing made by the author.

other in an open area. It may also be possible that the scene depicted on the southwest wall was an extended explanation of the hunt performed inside the arena presented on the opposite wall.

We now examine each chariot representation more closely. The king is shown riding in a chariot four times on the reliefs in this room. In hunting scenes, Assurbanipal exhibits his skills in using three different types of weapon: bow and arrows on the northeast wall, and sword and lance on the southwest wall. As we look at the crews accompanying the king in his chariot, an interesting fact is revealed. First we focus on the relief from the southwest wall, in which the two chariots are arranged symmetrically. On the left-hand side of the scene,¹⁷ where the king uses a sword (hence this will be called the “sword scene”), there are two soldiers and a charioteer accompanying the king (Fig. 5). It should be noted that all three attendants have long beards in this representation. On the right-hand side of the scene,¹⁸ in which the king holds a lance (hence this will be called the “lance scene”), the king is also accompanied by three attendants who consist of a charioteer and two other soldiers, one of whom, however, has *no* beard (Fig. 6). The attendant without a beard is presumably a eunuch, who is holding the king's bow while he strikes a lion with a lance. It is noteworthy that the members of the chariot crew differ between the left- and right-hand sides of the scene represented symmetrically on the southwest wall.

As we turn our attention to the king's accessories, a subtle difference is again noticeable. In the “sword scene,” the king wears an armband on each of his upper arms, which takes the form of a big rosette in the center, fixed by two parallel bands. He wears a pair of bracelets in the same design on each of his wrists. In the “lance scene,” however, the king's armband is in a different style. It has a smaller rosette in the center, to which is attached a single band that winds around his arm with its ends being separated. There is also a change in the bracelet in this scene. Although the design remains the same as those worn in the “sword scene,” the king wears a bracelet only on his right wrist.

We now turn to the representation of the reliefs on the northeast wall. The king represented inside the arena draws a bow (hence this will be called the “bow and arrow scene”).¹⁹ He is accompanied by a charioteer and two attendants, one of whom has no beard (Fig. 7). The two attendants are facing backwards and are driving away a lion attacking from behind. In this scene, the king's accessories are the same as in the “lance scene”: a single bracelet on his right wrist, and a pair of armbands in the style of a single coiling band on the upper arms. This combination of features, noted in the chariot crews that include a eunuch and the style of the king's armbands and a bracelet, agrees with those represented in the lance scene. Finally, in the “preparation

¹⁷ Barnett 1976: plate XI (slabs 20–21).

¹⁸ Barnett 1976: plate XII (slab 24).

¹⁹ Barnett 1976: plate VII (slab 14).



Figure 5: The sword scene from the king's lion hunt relief (BM ME 124850-1), from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh. The British Museum. Photograph taken by the author; reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 6: The lance scene from the king's lion hunt relief (BM ME 124854), from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh. The British Museum. Photograph taken by the author; reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 7: The bow and arrow scene from the king's lion hunt relief (BM ME 124867), from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh. The British Museum. Photograph taken by the author; reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

scene,”²⁰ the king is accompanied by a charioteer and two bearded soldiers; a eunuch is not included in this scene (Fig. 8). The king's accessories are also the same as those in the “sword scene”: a pair of armbands with a big rosette attached to two parallel bands, and a bracelet on each wrist.

Thus the combination of the chariot crew and the king's accessories can be divided into two groups. One appears in the “sword” and the “preparation” scenes, in which the attendants consist of three bearded men, and the king wears a pair of armbands with a big rosette attached to double bands as well as a pair of bracelets (Type A in Fig. 4). The other is shown in the “lance” and the “bow and arrow” scenes, in which a eunuch is included in the chariot crew, and the king wears a pair of coiled armbands and a bracelet only on his right wrist (Type B in Fig. 4). These identical units of reliefs are located across the room on the wall. What does this imply? One explanation may be that the king changed his accessories as well as the members of his chariots in the middle of the hunt, if all the hunt scenes are to be regarded as taking place on the same occasion. Changing costumes in the middle of an important ceremony may not have been impossible, if the king's garment needed to be kept clean of the victims' blood, for example. This would not explain, however, why the king had to go so far as to change even his armbands and bracelets along with the chariot crews. Since the depiction of the king is consistent in his physical features as

²⁰ Barnett 1976: plate V (slab 5).

well as in his clothes in the representation of the reliefs in Room C, it is very unlikely that these subtle differences imply the possibility that they are different kings, as suggested by Brentjes (1994) concerning the identity of two royal images depicted on a relief in Assurnasirpal II's throneroom (discussed below). There is no doubt that the four images appearing in the reliefs of this room portray a single king, Assurbanipal. Those accompanying the king in the chariot would have been members of an extremely elite unit who had the great honor of driving the chariot and protecting the king from the lions' attack at one of the most spectacular events watched by the people. At that time, everyone probably knew who each person was who accompanied the king. If it was unlikely that the king changed his outfit to the level of personal ornaments in the middle of the hunt, then it is highly possible that at least two different lion hunt events are integrated here, which were carried out at different times and possibly in different places. People at that time were so familiar with these events that there was no need to explain the details of each event separately in texts; it was simply understood and shared as a norm.

It is well known that Assurbanipal's royal inscriptions that describe historical events are not straightforward in terms of chronological order, and this has presented great difficulties to historians in reconstructing actual historical incidents in order.²¹ There has also been speculation that reliefs depicting historical affairs do not necessarily follow our understanding of a chronological framework, instead combining incidents that happened on separate occasions to create a new dimension of historical accounts from an Assyrian political point of view. The differences observed in the chariot crews and in the king's personal ornaments were clearly made on purpose in the representation of the lion hunt scenes from Room C.²² The fact that the two sets of these units alternate in the scheme of these reliefs indicates that the differences were not due to mere variations deriving from the work of different craftsmen but that they were made systematically. The consistent depiction of the two units appearing in the scene is likely to be based on the idea that they were not all from the same occasion, but were taken from separate incidents. The faithful representation of the king and the chariot team would have been regarded as being of the greatest importance at the time of execution, and it is therefore natural to assume that the utmost care was paid to the details of their representations. The lion hunt reliefs, arranged symmetrically on the southwest wall of Room C, thus serve as clear evidence to support the practice of integrating multiple incidents into a unified framework, and this was probably a common practice applied to artistic and textual compositions at the time of Assurbanipal.

²¹ For the problem of chronology in general, see Grayson 1991, 1980; for issues concerning Babylonia, see Frame 1992. The author is indebted to Jamie Novotny for this information.

²² See Aker 2007 for a detailed discussion on variations deriving from different workmanship and their systematic contribution to indicate a hierarchic order of rank for individuals.



Figure 8: The preparation scene from the king's lion hunt relief (BM ME 124858), from Room C, the North Palace, Nineveh. The British Museum. Photograph taken by the author; reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Special Features of the “Centric Arrangement”: The Presentation Scene

There is another representation on Assurbanipal's reliefs in which multiple events have probably been integrated as if they were taking place simultaneously. A relief, BM ANE 124945–6, was discovered in Room M (the “Throne Room”) of the North Palace at Nineveh, and is now housed in the British Museum (Fig. 9).²³ The slabs are divided into two registers: an upper register and a lower register,²⁴ which are separated by a broad wavy band, each side of which forms the bank of a river. Two rivers flow horizontally in parallel in the center of the slabs. The presentation scene appears in the lower register, which shows Assurbanipal reviewing war spoils taken from Babylon after the city was captured by the Assyrian army in late 648 BCE. The scene is further divided into three rows by simple horizontal lines, each forming a ground line that normally indicates the

²³ See Barnett 1976: plate XXXV for an illustration.

²⁴ The upper register has only partially survived, and is further divided into two rows separated by the depiction of a stream. Its upper row shows the destruction of a city and its lower row a procession of soldiers carrying away war spoils along the river, on which floats the naked body of an enemy and an Elamite chariot. The spoils include a wheeled throne, weapons or stakes, and the statues of two bulls, each of which is pulled in a cart. Reade (1976: 103–104) suggested that the presence of the bulls identifies the city which is being destroyed as Susa. The removal of “fierce wild bulls that adorned the gates” of temples at Susa is mentioned in Prism F (v 41–42) and Prism A (vi 60–62); Borger 1996: 55.

recession of space based on the principle of “vertical perspective,” in which distant figures are placed higher than nearer ones.²⁵ The king is represented on the right of the scene, occupying the upper and middle rows. He is mounted on a chariot and is accompanied by courtiers and soldiers who all face to the left of the scene. An epigraph is engraved above the horses of the king’s chariot. On the other side of the scene, Assyrian soldiers, in the upper row, proceed towards the king. The first person is a eunuch raising his right hand; he is followed by a bearded man. Then there are three soldiers, each holding the regalia that belonged to the Babylonian king, Shamash-Shumu-ukīn. These three items have been identified, from right to left, as the crown, seal and the scepter (Novotny and Watanabe 2008). These men are followed by two wheeled vehicles: one is carried on the shoulders of several men and the other is pulled by a group of soldiers. To the far left of the scene, prisoners are led away by soldiers. In the middle row, four foreigners face right, and behind them stand two scribes making a record in front of a pile of bows and quivers and a pile of severed heads. The lower row shows a procession of prisoners; all of them move from left to right. To the far left, there are two sets of chariots, with soldiers leading the horses. The overall composition, except for the lower row, is arranged symmetrically facing to the center, with special emphasis on the king.

The scene in question appears in the middle row where four foreigners stand in front of the royal chariot facing the Assyrian king. Reade (1998: 221–31; cf. 1976: 97–106) suggested that this scene is a composite representation of triumph and acts of submission that did not actually happen simultaneously. His hypothesis of the scene being a composite representation is supported by the textual evidence. This episode is not mentioned in the epigraph, nor are there any textual references to four foreigners simultaneously paying homage to the Assyrian king at the time of the fall of Babylon. Reade identified the foreigners as (from right to left) the Elamite king Tammaritu II, the Qedarite Arab leader Abī-Iate’ and his brother Aia-ammu, and the Nabatean king Natnu, based on incidents recorded in a royal inscription. According to Prism A, Tammaritu II submitted to Assurbanipal in Nineveh after he fled from the new Elamite king, Indabibi, who had usurped his throne; Tammaritu II took refuge in Assyria with 85 nobles and his family.²⁶ There is a passage mentioning him standing before Assurbanipal, praising his lordship and extolling his valor to the great gods. If the scene records this particular flight of Tammaritu to Assyria, then the episode should have taken place in 650 BCE. He is also known to have taken refuge in Assyria again sometime around 648 BCE when Ummanaldas (Khumban-Khaltash III) seized the Elamite throne. In either

²⁵ The Assyrians used two distinct principles for rendering depth: one is by means of the vertical arrangement (“vertical perspective”) as used here, which enables the artist to indicate the recession of space in as much depth as he wishes. The other method is the overlapping of figures that stand on the same ground line, which is used for representing the rather shallow spatial recessions perceived between the figures. Cf. Russell 1987: 523–25; 1991: 193; and 1993: 57–61.

²⁶ Borger 1996: 42–43 Prism A IV 9–41.

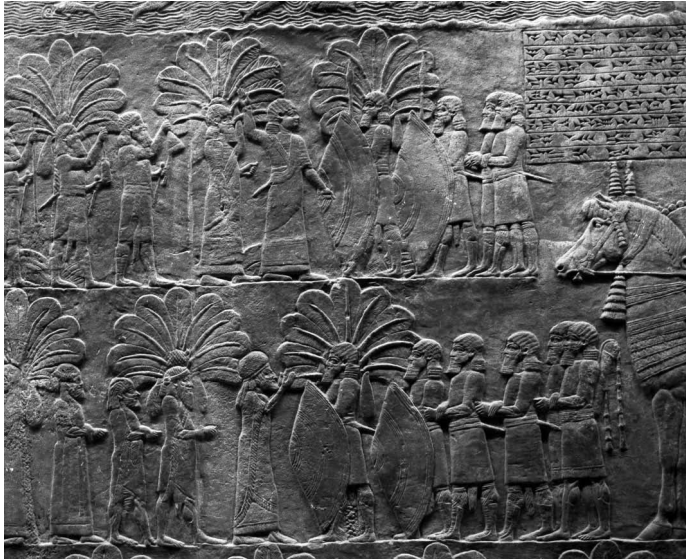


Figure 9: The presentation scene of Assurbanipal (BM ME 124945-6 upper and middle rows), from Room M, the North Palace, Nineveh. The British Museum. Photograph taken by the author; reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

case it is an enigma, since the king's inscriptions record that this Elamite came only to Nineveh, but the scene depicted on this relief is set against a background of palm trees, which indicates that the event took place in southern Mesopotamia, not in Assyria. The parading of Shamash-Shumu-ukin's royal property most probably took place outside of Babylon itself.

This part of the scene is composed in a centric arrangement, in which the visual flow is directed towards the center of the scene, that is, between the king's chariot and the rows of Assyrian soldiers holding the war spoils in the upper row as well as the four foreigners in the middle row. Thus, in both the lion hunt relief from the southwest wall of Room C and the presentation scene from Room M with four foreigners, the centric arrangement is used to integrate different events in time and place in the same scene, as if these events are all taking place simultaneously. The manner of this representation is not the same as "complete style" in Wickhoff's terminology, since the events do not seem to relate to each other in the storyline of a single episode. Rather multiple incidents are combined within a manipulated visual framework that creates a new dimension of historical events. Regardless of the truth of their accounts of historical incidents, these images were projected to the viewers in order to shape their perception of historical fact, thus fulfilling its original function to idealize the state of Assyria and to glorify the achievement of the king.

Centric Arrangement in the Ninth Century BCE

The question arises of how far back this special feature of centric arrangement can be traced in the tradition of Assyrian art. The symmetrical relief of Assurnasirpal II from the Throne Room has been the subject of much debate so far, and various interpretations have been suggested (Fig. 3). Brentjes (1994) suggested that they are not two images of Assurnasirpal II but represent his father and his grandfather due to different depictions of details. Roaf (2008), in contrast, argued that such minor differences are not confined to the king, but are also present on the genies and on the tree in the middle. He suggested that these differences are the result of having been executed by different craftsmen and that they therefore cannot be used as evidence that the kings on the left and on the right represented different individuals.

These two almost identical slabs of relief were installed in the throneroom (Room B) of Assurnasirpal II in his palace at Nimrud (slabs 13 and 23). The relief shows two Assyrian kings standing on the right- and left-hand sides of a sacred tree, facing each other. Each figure of the king has a human-headed winged genie standing behind him, and there is a winged disk above the sacred tree. The relief is often described as a “mirror-image” or “symmetrical” relief of Assurnasirpal II due to its centric arrangement. Each relief was placed in a special niche, unlike the other reliefs in this room depicting historical narratives, and they occupied special places in the throneroom. One relief (Room B, slab 23) was set immediately behind the throne and the other (Room B, slab 13) was placed on the wall that would have been the first thing to be seen by a visitor on entering the throneroom (Winter 1981: 10). The location of these reliefs implies that they must have been of special importance to convey significant visual messages to the viewers.

As noted by previous studies (Brentjes 1994; Roaf 2008; Ataç 2006), the depiction of the king on the left and right of the sacred tree presents various differences. The king depicted on the left, for example, raises his right hand and points at the sacred tree with his forefinger pointed slightly downwards. The king on the right, however, points upwards at the winged disk. Moreover, the king on the left holds a scepter horizontally in his left hand by stretching down his arm, while on the right of the scene his arm is bent 90 degrees to hold the scepter vertically, and his arm is covered with a piece of cloth, binding it close to his torso. Furthermore, the armbands, one on each of the king's upper arms, depicted on the left of the scene, are not both present on the figure on the right. Therefore the posture of the two figures is not the same, and it is hard to interpret the two representations as that of rotation symmetry. There are other subtle differences observed in the ends of diadems, the patterns of rosettes on the hems of the king's tunic, the forms of the ties hanging down from the tunic neck, the styles of the strands of the necklaces, and the numbers of incised lines above the beard and hair curls, as suggested by Roaf (2008: 212), and different styles of sandals noted by Brown (2010: 26).

Brentjes (1994) regarded these differences as evidence that the two images represent not the portrayal of Assurnasirpal II but that of his father, Tukulti-Ninurta II, and

his grandfather, Adad-nirari II. He argues that the king's legitimacy to the throne is supported by the display of these representations of his father and grandfather, who are both mentioned conventionally in the royal title in texts. Brown (2010: 26–27) argues that, considering the Assyrian ancestor cult²⁷ and the architectural features of the Northwest Palace, the differences between the two kings' outfits strongly suggest that they are not the same king. He points out that as Assurnasirpal II is represented in a standardized manner in adjacent reliefs (Room B, slabs 12 and 14), this suggests that the kings shown in different costumes should be regarded as different men. Brown's interpretation makes sense if we envision Assurnasirpal II being flanked by his predecessors as he sat on the throne. It also raises questions, however, as to whether this interpretation should also be applied to the depiction of the two kings represented on the glazed brick façade of Shalmaneser III, that is, that they are not images of Shalmaneser himself but that of his father, Assurnasirpal II, and his grandfather, Tukulti-Ninurta II. We do not know, however, what dress code was applied to the king in accordance with different royal duties. It is not clear either whether the attribution of one fixed costume to one king throughout his reign in artistic representations is appropriate or not. This hypothesis would exclude any possibility that the same king is portrayed with different costumes according to different occasions and different royal duties.

Ataç (2006) regarded these differences as presenting two separate images of the king, and perhaps two different aspects of kingship that he defines as “terrestrial/esoteric” and “celestial/exoteric” kingship. Although it is not explicitly mentioned how he regards the identity of the two images, his interpretation suggests that both figures are seen as belonging to one king, Assurnasirpal II, and the two different aspects of his kingship are expressed in this relief. It appears that the facial features on the right and left of Assurnasirpal II's symmetrical relief are very similar, if not identical, rather than showing two completely different individuals. Further, the facial features of the king depicted in other scenes of the throneroom reliefs also appear consistent with those on the symmetrical panel in question. Nor do these facial features contradict those on a round statue of Assurnasirpal II excavated at the temple of Ishtar Sharrat-niphi at Nimrud.²⁸ Naturally, the question remains of how far we should take into account the issue of family resemblance and individual characteristics in the ninth century representations. In the late Assyrian tradition, for example, Assurbanipal's physical proportion and facial characteristics present certain differences from those of his grandfather, Sennacherib, in the representations of palace reliefs.

²⁷ Richardson (1999–2001) discussed the matter from the point of view of ancestor cult and suggested that each sacred tree depicted on the walls of the Northwest Palace can be identified with an individual deceased Assyrian king.

²⁸ For the statue, see Layard 1853: plate 52; Curtis and Reade 1995: 43.

Conclusion

Close examination of the lion hunt reliefs from Room C as well as the presentation scene from Room M has revealed that one characteristic of the centric arrangement is the amalgamation of different events. This feature presents a contrast with that of linear arrangement, in which repeated figures are all related in one storyline that develops over time. The organization of incidents by means of centric arrangement allows the artists to combine separate incidents, which may not have even been interrelated in the light of “real” historical fact. This integration of multiple incidents was used to project strong visual messages to the viewers either by summarizing significant events under the same theme, such as the royal lion hunts, or by combining various episodes in a manipulative manner within a victorious framework, as seen in the presentation scene after the fall of Babylon. The purpose was to present an official and political account of “historical facts” as seen by the state of Assyria. This composition was thus used to create artificial historical “facts” in order to serve as political propaganda through visual representation.

As for the controversial relief of Assurnasirpal II in his throneroom, one thing is clear: the representation of the king undoubtedly occupied the most important place in the execution of any relief, and would have been created with the utmost care and skills, including depictions of his posture, garments and accessories, because the king should occupy the center of focus of the whole composition. Any subtle differences concerning the king, therefore, should be regarded primarily as having been portrayed on purpose rather than being careless mistakes or variations caused by different craftsmen. The two kings depicted in the manner of centric arrangement in Assurnasirpal II's throneroom in Nimrud can hardly be described as that of rotation symmetry due to the many differences between the right and left of the images. Suggestions by Brentjes and Brown that the two kings represent different individuals should be regarded as plausible. However, the later artistic principle of the centric arrangement observed in the reliefs showing Assurbanipal hunting lions, in which different incidents in time and space are integrated into one scene, may indicate another possible interpretation. The figure of the king on the left of the sacred tree may show an occasion when the king worshipped the sacred tree and that on the right may present another occasion when he worshipped the winged disk. Although we do not know whether it is appropriate to apply the more recent tradition to this earlier example, it should be remembered that from the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I in the thirteenth century BCE, there was a strong tendency in Assyrian art to integrate incidents that took place at different times in a unified scene. One should not exclude the possibility, therefore, that the principle used at the time of Assurbanipal may already have been in use some 200 years earlier at the time of Assurnasirpal II, when artists applied the scheme of centric arrangement to the monumental reliefs set on the walls of the throneroom of the Northwest Palace.

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IV. Social Identities

Sarah B. Graff

Sexuality, Reproduction and Gender in Terracotta Plaques from the Late Third-Early Second Millennium BCE

Abstract: Clay was perhaps the most abundant resource of ancient Mesopotamia, and its importance in the ancient Near Eastern conceptual and mythological world, in which it is the basic material from which life was created, reflects its ubiquity. Molded baked clay (terracotta) plaques were produced in great numbers, especially during the end of the third millennium and early centuries of the second millennium BCE. Not only the subject matter – often the depiction of a nude female figure – but also the method by which these objects were created, in which raw material was given shape in a mold and brought forth in an analogue of birth, had strongly gendered associations. In recent decades there has been increasing interest in critically examining the basic assumptions that underlie the modern interpretation of these representations, starting as early as 1968 with Marie-Thérèse Barrelet’s suggestion that there may have been female artisans working in clay in antiquity. More recently, scholars such as Zainab Bahrani have made a persuasive case for expanding the reading of terracottas depicting nude females beyond the realm of fertility and into that of sexual allure. This essay will examine the question of whether the manufacture and use of mold-made terracottas can be linked with sexuality – for both male and female viewers – and reproduction, with the aim of continuing to broaden the interpretation of nude female images in clay beyond the two poles of “mass-produced artifact” and “goddess.”

Keywords: birth, bricks, ceramic, clay, eroticism, fertility, figurine, gender, plaque, nudity, sexuality, terracotta

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Introduction

Clay was a universally available and symbolically loaded material for the manufacture of images in ancient Mesopotamia. Its ubiquity in both the physical and conceptual worlds is evident from mentions in literary and historical texts, from its importance in omens and incantations, and not least from the evidence of terracotta plaques and figurines, which have survived in great numbers. The height of the production of mold-made plaques was during the late third through early second millennium BCE in

Mesopotamia. In their exuberant variety and iconographic richness, these plaques present a valuable corpus for the exploration of the role of images in the lives of ordinary people in antiquity. This investigation will take as its starting point the plaques that depict nude frontal female figures, the most common image in the repertoire. After a brief critical overview of some recent approaches to these plaques, my primary concern is to focus attention on several aspects of their appearance, manufacture and the conceptual framework within which they acted, with an eye towards how ancient Near Eastern gender roles and ideologies can be traced through such investigations. I do not seek to define what these plaques meant nor how they were used, questions which continue to be debated and which no essay of limited scope could effectively encapsulate. Rather, my intent is to expand the possibilities for their interpretation and to explore what they may be able to tell us about the construction of interlinked concepts of gender, sexuality, and reproduction in ancient Mesopotamia.

It has been perceptively argued by scholars whose own worldview is informed by monotheistic religions that ancient polytheistic beliefs remain stubbornly out of reach of our efforts to comprehend them, because the entire conceptual structure of these beliefs is inescapably foreign to those operating within dominant modern monotheistic worldviews (Oppenheim 1964: 182–83; Westenholz 1998: 63; Moorey 2003: 9). It is not that evidence is insufficient, but that we can only view it through cultural “filters” that distort our understanding of the past. This limitation necessitates a different approach: instead of attempting to perfectly match image and interpretation, what is called for is an expansion of perspectives that allows for fluidity, multivalence, and the coexistence of multiple, even conflicting, interpretations. Such an approach is ideally suited for the images that are the focus of this paper, which present serious difficulties concerning even the foundational question of whom – divine or human – these images were meant to represent.¹ Rather than argue for any specific identification, I suggest here that it is worthwhile to explore the questions raised by these images, and to resist providing definitive answers at the expense of expanding possibilities.

Overview of the Plaques and their Imagery

Mold-made terracotta plaques were made during the Akkadian period (Auerbach 1994: 23–24, 74–76; Madhlum 1960: pl. 9, no. 9, pl. 10, no. 12; Auerbach 1992: 309), although the technology used to produce them was already known and not an innovation of that era.² These early plaques exclusively depicted images of a frontal

¹ See among others Dales 1960: 250–65; Opificius 1961: 203–205; Barrelet 1968: 233–41; U. Winter 1983; Blocher 1987; Wiggermann 1998–2001; Uehlinger 1998–2001; Pruss 2002.

² Barrelet 1968: 89–91, followed by Moorey 2005: 71–72; both scholars drew connections between the development of brick stamps and of clay molds. Barrelet notes opposing views by other scholars such

naked female figure with hands clasped to the chest, iconography clearly derived from the hand-modeled figurines of nude females in the round which already at this time had been produced in the ancient Near East for millennia. The earliest plaques have been attested to date only at Tell al-Wilayah and Tell Asmar, although archaeological evidence from well-stratified Akkadian contexts is rare, so perhaps they were more widespread than would seem from the available information. Plaques with other types of imagery appeared in subsequent periods, although the nude female image retained its prevalence and plaques depicting variations of this figure became widespread throughout Babylonia. Although changes in style and manufacture can be traced over time, the imagery is remarkably consistent. I will discuss plaques dating to the late third through early second millennium BCE – the Ur III, Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian periods – with comparisons to some Late Bronze Age examples from the western areas of the ancient Near East.

The plaques, which are generally tongue-shaped or rectangular, show images of frontally oriented women framed by a featureless background. (Figs. 1, 2) Some examples show the woman standing on a small platform. The figures' hair usually hangs to the shoulders and rests there in symmetrical bunches, while details preserved on some plaques imply curls. Thus the hair is shown as a carefully styled coiffure, not as simply loose and flowing tresses. Horned crowns or other headdresses are not worn, although some figures wear a fillet. The figures are very commonly adorned with jewelry – most often multi-stranded necklaces, but also bracelets, anklets, and girdles.

Their nudity requires further discussion, as Mesopotamian notions of nakedness differ from modern concepts; for example, there seems to have been no aesthetic distinction between “nude” and “naked,” as there is in Western art (Bahrani 2001: 43; Biggs 1998–2001: 64). The clearest example of female nudity in ancient texts appears in the Descent of Ishtar to the Netherworld, in which the goddess must remove her clothing and adornments, including jewelry, at each of the seven gates to the Netherworld and enter the realm completely naked (Jacobsen 1987: 205–32). Thus, jewelry such as that worn by the figures on the plaques was an important component of dress. These figures were probably not interpreted by their original audiences as “nude” *per se*, but rather as dressed in an erotically charged manner, since female beauty and allure are strongly associated with jewelry (Bahrani 1993; Bahrani 2001: 87–88; Benz, forthcoming). Their bodies are slender and youthful. The vulva is clearly depicted, with or without additional patterning to indicate pubic hair. They usually lift their breasts with their hands or clasp their hands together at chest level. Some are shown holding or nursing infants, but the single figure is far more common. Their gestures, frontal aspect, and isolation against an undecorated background produce images that are non-narrative and engaged intently in an exchange of gazes with the viewer.

as van Buren, Parrot, Opificius and Dales, who argued that the technique of stamping an image on clay was “invented” during the Ur III period.



Figure 1: Mold-made terracotta figurine from Diqdiqqah, Ur, Iraq. British Museum 116801. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 2: Mold-made terracotta figurine, findspot unknown. Ashmolean Museum 1924.499. Photo courtesy of Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Previous Interpretations and the Mother Goddess Legacy

It is clear from P.R.S. Moorey's (2005: 1–2) authoritative review of major developments in the study of ancient Near Eastern terracottas that the primary object of scholarly interest from the beginning has been the representations of female figures. This is in part because of the striking prevalence of female images in clay: although there are exceptions and legitimate doubts about the methods used to tally figurines' gender (compare Tringham and Conkey 1998: 27; Meskell 1998b: 51; Joyce 2008: 8–10, on figurines in general), representations of women are the most common images in terracotta for the entire span of ancient Near Eastern history. Beyond the sheer numerical facts, prehistoric female figurines in particular have been put forth as evidence for the worship of a "Mother Goddess" and likewise for the existence of matriarchal societies in "Old Europe" and the Near East (discussed in Goodison and Morris 1998: 6–21; Meskell 1998a; Moorey 2003: 5–6; Bahrani 2001: 46–47, with references). However, scholarly opinion has shifted decisively away from these theories and toward more nuanced, less uniform interpretations of prehistoric figurines that focus on excavation context and deeply engage with anthropological theories (Conkey and Tringham 1995; Hamilton *et al.* 1996; Goodison and Morris 1998; Bailey 2010). The work of Peter Ucko (1968), followed by that of Mary Voigt (1983), has been especially influential in opening up the interpretive possibilities for figurines by defining five functional categories: cult images, vehicles of magic, teaching tools, representations of known individuals (either living or dead), and toys. These categories are not rigid nor mutually exclusive: a single object could have had several functions during its lifespan, while objects that look similar could also have served quite different purposes, depending on the needs of the people who used them (Moorey 2003: 7). While several of these five categories could have applied to the plaques discussed here, the main point I wish to emphasize is the flexibility of meaning and purpose they suggest for these small, personal objects. The intended use of the Babylonian plaques may have been amuletic, but this could have been additional to their use in the context of teaching or storytelling, as remembrances or tokens of ritual observance, or other purposes that remain obscure to us because of their personal and popular (that is, non-elite, thus lacking textual corroboration) character (Moorey 1975: 98).

From the outset, it is evident that interpretations of the naked female plaques have been colored by the idea of a universal Mother Goddess most closely associated with the prehistoric female figurines mentioned above, because of their nudity and the emphasis on their breasts and genitals (compare Wiggermann 1998–2001; discussion in Bahrani 2001: 48–51; Pruss 2002). They are often seen as connected with fertility because of these aspects, although Gwendolyn Leick (1994: 123) has made a strong case based on Sumerian literature of the late third and early second millen-

nium BCE that fertility was conceptually associated not with female bodies, but rather with the phallus and semen. Alternatively, they have also been identified as goddesses, or as priestesses or other religious functionaries such as temple prostitutes (see literature review in Blocher 1987: 54–76). More recently, theories have moved away from generalizations about the entire category of plaques and instead have presented focused interpretations of smaller groups. As the previous scholarship on the topic is immense, I will mention here only a selection in order to give a sense of the range of current interpretations.

In a general review of the naked female motif, Christoph Uehlinger (1998–2001: 58) suggests that the plaques may have been used in connection with the initiation of young women into adulthood, after which they were ceremonially broken. F.A.M. Wiggermann (1985–86), basing his argument on a bronze votive vulva from Assur dated to the Old Assyrian period and inscribed with the sign *TĒŠ/baštu*, interprets the nude female figures as embodiments of a concept meaning “dignity,” “pride,” “beauty” and other positive associations. He associates these concepts embodied by nude females with private life and intensely personal emotions, while noting that the philological evidence presents significant difficulties because the concepts it describes are associated so closely with the psychology of ancient people (Wiggermann 1998–2001). Zainab Bahrani (1996, 2001) outlined four different iconographic categories for images of nude females – the mother, the seductress, the sexual partner and the entertainer. The nude female plaques predominantly belong to her seductress category, although she emphasized that all four categories of nude female images presented an idealized femininity, centered on provocative display of sexual attributes, that was primarily intended for the erotic enjoyment of the male viewer. Moorey (2003: 34, addressing the arguments of U. Winter 1983 and Keel and Uehlinger 1998) noted that there was no evidence for identifying the image either as a representation of a goddess or as an embodiment of the goddess as woman with whom ordinary women could identify. He identified the sexualized nudity of the plaques with the general sphere of Inanna/Ishtar, but emphasized the need to situate individual plaques in their local contexts rather than treat them as expressions of a single motif (Moorey 2005: 77–79).

I would like to suggest an additional reason that these images have often been interpreted as religious in nature. Simply put, their sheer popularity is remarkable. Images of nude females appeared on the earliest mold-made plaques produced during the Akkadian period to the exclusion of other imagery, and continued to be the most widespread motif through the peak of terracotta plaque manufacture in the Isin-Larsa/Old Babylonian period. Why would these images – often universalized as a single archetypal image of “woman,” although in fact there are significant differences in jewelry, hairstyle, posture, and style among them – have been produced in such profusion if not for religious purposes? What would justify the mass-production of images of non-divine women who were not priestesses, or at least engaged in ritual functions? These are evidently rather discomfiting questions, as perhaps the most direct answer is that the plaques were produced for purposes of aesthetic and erotic

pleasure (compare the related images of nude females on Canaanite metal plaques and pendants discussed by Benzel, forthcoming) – an issue we will return to below.

Archaeological Context: Disposition and Breakage

Archaeological context provides evidence that most terracottas from this period were used by private individuals in the home. Nearly all excavated plaques and figurines derive from domestic contexts, with a smaller number appearing in burials and in temples.³ However, even these were rarely found in situ – that is, they have generally been excavated in locations suggesting disposal rather than display. Many excavated plaques and figurines show signs of damage, and may have been deliberately broken once they had served their ritual purpose and it was no longer desirable for them to remain charged with power (Moorey 2003: 29). The lack of plastering or fittings for attachment on the backs of most terracotta plaques support the idea that these objects were not intended for permanent installation but rather for transitory use (Auerbach 1994: 3, 327–28). When terracottas are mentioned in texts, it is frequently in reference to what seems to be their inevitable destruction. In an Ur III letter to the sun-god Utu, Sin-iddinam wrote: “The people have been smashed like terracotta figurines; they (?) have perished all together” (ETCSL c.3.2.05; translation in Ornan 2010: 122). A text from the time of Hammurabi similarly refers to one “who destroys (enemy) warriors like a clay image (*ša-lam ti-di-im*)” (CAD *šalmu*: 79; LIH 60 iv 17). In both phrases a clear parallel is drawn between the actual death of people and the metaphoric death of this category of objects through breakage. The common occurrence of terracottas in domestic contexts and their frequent, potentially deliberate, breakage are powerful evidence for the widespread use of these objects in domestic ritual (Pruss 2002; Uehlinger 1998–2001). But deposition only indicates how a figurine or plaque was discarded and does not shed light on the multiple lives of these objects and the functional categories through which they may have passed.

However, many other questions about terracotta plaques and figurines remain worthy of consideration. Clay, as has often been noted, is a conceptually powerful material itself and its use for these objects has important implications. Additionally, while the practical reasons for the use of molds are well known, ideological factors that underlie their use could be investigated. We may also attempt to understand more about terracottas by looking at their imagery in the context of contemporary literary and magical texts, and by applying modern theoretical approaches.

³ Pruss and Novák 2000; Pruss 2002; Assante 2002b: 14–15 argue that the examples found in temples are intrusions, but this is unconvincing in the light of Auerbach’s (1994: 319–29) painstaking analysis of find context of plaques from the Diyala, many of which were found in temples. Auerbach (1994: 317) also notes that there is no clear line between domestic and religious contexts, as, for example, a niche used for a devotional image within a house belongs to both.

Material: Clay and Potters

Clay was both ubiquitous in Babylonia and important as the raw material of life. Prior to shaping, clay had no inherent form or order and was associated with chaos and the unknown (Malul 2005). As related in *Atra-ḫasīs*, Enki and the mother goddess Mami, also known as Nintu and Ninšubur (among other names), worked together to model the first humans from clay mixed with the blood of a rebellious god (Lambert and Millard 1999: 59–63). Enki mixed the clay, from which the mother goddess then nipped off pieces for shaping into humans. These shaped clay pieces were then incubated by birth goddesses, seven for the males and seven for the females. Only after their gestation were these creatures transformed into living beings. The transformation could also go in reverse: the metaphor of people turning into clay was used to convey death and destruction (CAD T, s.v. *ṭidu* 5c: 108–109; Barrelet 1968: 23; Lambert and Millard 1999: 21 n. 2; Malul 2005: 549 n. 5). Clay thus required active intervention, in the form of shaping and incubation, in order to come to life – a process parallel to the molding and baking required to produce terracotta plaques.

The Sumerian and Akkadian words *baḫār*/*paḫaru* are usually translated as “potter,” but as the work of potters extended to the manufacture of other clay objects, Marie-Thérèse Barrelet (1968: 12) suggests that this term should instead be used in an inclusive way to designate a specialist who worked with clay. In her investigation of the role of the potter, Barrelet (1968: 21–23) also notes that goddesses were often described working with clay, although they were replaced in late texts by solely male clay-working gods. Were there likewise female potters in Babylonia? Female potters probably made by hand much of the household wares in early periods, although it is widely supposed that this type of production was superseded by the introduction of the wheel and the subsequent mass-production it enabled (Barrelet 1968: 24–25, with references). However, the assumption that women gave up any substantial involvement with potting with the introduction of the wheel should be challenged. This belief has been shaped by the 18th–19th century ideology that there are “separate spheres” for the work of men and women – both in terms of the type of work and the place where that work occurs (Wright 1991: 195). Rita Wright demonstrates that, in many ethnographic studies, the work of the potter in fact has been shown to involve many different steps and types of labor, from gathering firewood for the kiln to painting the finished pots; family members of various ages and genders assist with these steps, even if one individual is given credit for the work. We have very little documentation that would illuminate a similar situation for Babylonia, beyond a list of masculine crafts from the Ur III period that includes the term *baḫār* (Waetzoldt 1987: 121). Like the ethnographic studies, this list tells us only who received credit for the work. However, it is important to raise the possibility that women, alone or together with men, were engaged in making terracotta plaques during the late third and early second millennium BCE. The nude female plaques should perhaps be understood as more than objects of erotic pleasure made by men for male enjoyment, or talismans of fertility made by men for women.

A rather puzzling feature of one of these plaques should be mentioned, although the example in question derives from a Late Bronze Age context at Tell Munbaqa on the Middle Euphrates, and thus serves as a comparison from outside the earlier Babylonian corpus. Alexander Pruss noted the presence of a Sumerian inscription on the reverse of a mold reading *munus*/*mí*, “woman,” but dismisses the inscription as unhelpfully obvious and in any case probably related to the object’s maker or patron rather than the imagery.⁴ Both Wiggermann (1998–2001: 49) and Uehlinger (1998–2001: 57) separately discuss this mold, but in each case doubted the validity of the reading, with Uehlinger preferring to see it as a potter’s mark. However, I would argue that the use of the *munus* sign, even if it was not meant as a label per se, does indeed relate to the image on the mold. It is a performative⁵ sign, rather than a communication that conveys informative content. Inscribing the mold with the sign for “woman” can be seen as an act analogous to consecration, through which the image and the word work together to transform the raw material of clay into an object that literally embodies femininity. Both sign and image communicate the same idea, but the inclusion of both is only redundant if one sees the function of the object as simply to identify the image as that of a woman – that is, to be a sign indicating “woman” just as the *munus* sign does. In this interpretation, in the semiotic terms defined by Charles Saunders Peirce, the plaque marked with the *munus* sign is read as a combination of icon (the mimetic depiction of a woman) and symbol (the cuneiform sign that is to be read as “woman”), both meaning the same thing. In my view, it is far more likely that the image functioned not primarily as a sign, but as an index, with an extensive set of associations clustering around femininity, reproduction, and desire.

Divinely Facilitated Births: Wombs and Goddesses

There were many names for mother goddesses and goddesses of birth in Sumerian and Akkadian. Epithets for the mother goddess included “Lady Potter,”⁶ “Sculptor of the Land/Gods,” and “Carpenter of Mankind,”⁷ which compare her skills in crafting life to those of various artisans who give form to raw materials. However, shaping clay is the only craft activity the goddess is described as actually performing in order to create life. In *Atra-ḫasis*, as discussed above, the goddess Mami

⁴ Pruss 2002: 540; the mold is published in Kühne 1980: pl. VII, fig. 13; Pruss also mentions a mold inscribed with the sign *túg*, but as he gives no further reference to this object I will discuss only the mold with the *munus* sign.

⁵ Derrida 1982; on performativity in ancient Near Eastern art, see Bahrani 2001: 138–39.

⁶ “Potter” is also an epithet of Enlil; Lambert 1998: 191.

⁷ Stol 2000: 74–75, taken from the god list An=Anum; see also Stol 2000: 79, where a high priestess assisting a birth goddess may be referred to as “Copper-caster,” although the translation is uncertain.

mixes the flesh and blood of a slain god, “Wê-ila, who had personality,” into clay that Ea treads while Mami recites an incantation, after which she nips off fourteen pieces for shaping into the first humans (Lambert and Millard 1999: 59–63). Other texts describe her, under the name Bēlet-ili, pinching off clay and shaping it into beings; as the goddess Aruru, who shapes Enkidu from clay in the Gilgamesh epic, she also appears in a wisdom text that describes humans as “those whom Aruru had pinched off as lumps of clay” (Stol 2000: 78). Although she may have had other crafting skills, as demonstrated in her epithets, the specific way in which the mother goddess(es) is/are conceptualized as a creator is in relation to working with clay.

The birth goddesses are described assisting the mother goddess with her work in forming and birthing children (summarized in Stol 2000: 80–83). They are often referred to as simply *šassūru*, “wombs,” as is the mother goddess herself occasionally. Jean Bottéro translates the term *šassūru* in the context of referring to the birth goddesses as “mothers,” but suggests the word could have been used to metaphorically refer to the molds familiar in ancient Mesopotamia.⁸ The description of the work they are assigned in *Atra-ḫasis* closely resembles the work of manufacturing terracotta plaques, involving both shaping and incubating (figuratively “baking”) the shaped pieces of clay before producing the finished seven males and seven females. It is possible that there was an intentional linguistic flexibility or resonance between the maternal womb and the clay mold in this and other texts.

Male Creator Gods

Whether or not the work of creation required input from male gods varied.⁹ The two earliest theogonies differ in this respect: in the Nippur tradition, Heaven (An) and Earth (Ki) were the first male-female pair, while the Eridu tradition has only a single goddess, Nammu, who personifies the waters of the Apsû, as the mother of all the gods including An and Ki (Westenholz 1998: 68). Alternately, in the poem *The Creation of the Pickax*, Enlil alone makes flesh sprout forth by driving the pickax into a certain sacred area of the ground, without the involvement of a female counterpart (Kramer 1944: 51–53; Jacobsen 1946: 134–36; Lambert 1980–1983: 221). The problem with a bisexual model of reproduction in Mesopotamian creation myths was that it required brother-sister marriage, in spite of societal prohibitions against incest (Lam-

⁸ Bottéro 1952: 84: “...la déesse Mami fabrique avec l’argile quatorze “meres” (matrices? moules? forms?).”

⁹ Lambert 1980–1983; Vogelzang (1989–90: 71) suggests that Sumerian creation myths tended to feature a male-female pair, while Akkadian texts assigned creation to Ea alone. Leick (1994: 11–20) notes that while participants in the original act of creation can vary, the ongoing process that stems from it always involves a male-female pair.

bert 1980–1983: 221). The existence of versions of creation myths with male/female, lone male, and lone female protagonists suggest that, for this or other reasons, considerable flexibility was favored in these myths.

In myths of the creation of humans, male participation is more prominent. As already mentioned, Ea treads the clay for the mother goddess to mold in *Atra-ḫasis*. In the praise hymn *Enki and Ninmah*, the two gods fashion creatures from the clay of the Apsû in a drunken contest, of which Enki is the clear winner. The text is damaged and difficult to read, but it is possible that Enki won the contest by creating – and then impregnating – the first human female capable of reproduction (Kilmer 1976). As Leick (1994: 28) states, “The lines in the centre of the text comprise the theory of conception and birth: the germ of life, the male semen, is received by the womb, which gives birth. ... The male semen is able to create life; hence it is a divine substance, endowed on mankind by Enki.” However crucial the role of the mother goddesses and “wombs,” creation (in myth, as in life) required the contribution of a male.

Another case in support of this interpretation is the praise hymn *Enki and Ninhursaga*, in which Enki eats the plants that Ninhursaga grew from his spilled semen, enraging her so that she curses him with sickness that is only healed after she places him inside her vagina and gives birth to deities that correspond to his limbs. Although Enki is presented here in a comic situation, in which he seems to have become pregnant from ingesting his own semen and cannot find relief from his condition without availing himself of the reproductive capabilities of Ninhursaga (Leick 1994: 35–39), the generative power is still his own, not the goddess’. She can nurture it, in the form of the plants, and can bring it to fruition in a way that Enki cannot, but she cannot produce it herself. Leick (1994: 39) suggests that the double entendres in this text hinged on the alternate readings of the Sumerian sign **a** as either semen or water, with obvious implications for the power of both substances to produce and sustain life.

Human Birth: Bricks and Plaques

Much of the evidence for the importance of clay as a ritually charged material comes from its use not as plaques, but as bricks. Bricks (which like plaques could be molded, stamped, and baked) were used in birth rituals, where they seem to have played both practical and symbolic roles. Anne D. Kilmer (1987: 212) presents the evidence for the metaphoric and actual uses of the “brick of birth,” arguing for a connection between unbaked clay bricks and placental material, namely that “the fetus may have been thought of as the product that developed in and from the malleable, clay-like placenta.” To support this analogy, she cites several examples of wordplay between terms for bricks and womb/innards/placenta, such as a line from Gudea that reads: “It (the brick, sig₄) looks at the clay-pit (ka-al(a)) of its earth-of-the-womb (im-agarin-

na).¹⁰ The Sumerian hymn to the temple of the mother goddess Ninhursaga in her city, Keš, contains the epithet “Keš, brick(-work) (of?) birthgiving.”¹¹ In the omen series *Šumma izbu*, omens describe a woman giving birth to a variety of clay objects: a brick; two or three bricks; clay; a child whose eyes are “like the brick(s) of a wall”; and either clay or a brick. The Old Babylonian version of the text likewise contains the line “If an anomaly is like a brick.”¹² Although many of the anomalous births listed in this omen series likely were never actually observed, that does not mean that the priests who compiled the series considered these and similarly impossible events to be meaningless or merely fantastical (see Veldhuis 2006 on the creative rather than documentary aspects of omen compendia). The inclusion of births involving bricks and clay in the omen compendia tells us that such events were matters of particular interest. The textual evidence strongly suggests there was thought to be an ideological connection between human reproduction and the process of crafting objects from clay (compare McGeough 2006, who further explores this “conceptual link” in Mesopotamian, Biblical and Egyptian contexts).

Kilmer (1987: 212) further notes that at the birth of a child, as described in *Atra-ḥasis*, a brick was placed by the midwife during the delivery and then remained in place for either seven or nine days after the birth to honor the birth goddess (Lambert and Millard 1999: 63–65). I would argue that the brick of birth served as a substitute or double for the newborn during the first week of life. This was a dangerous time of transition from fetus to fully-developed human, which may be reflected in the demonic beings known by the name *kūbu* that were depicted as late-term fetuses and that could bring either illness or protection to humans.¹³ After this window of time had closed and the brick had fulfilled its function as substitute, it could then be discarded (compare Stol 2000: 144–45 for methods of disposal of the placenta). Although the text does not explicitly ascribe this function to the brick of birth, the creation or designation of a substitute in order to absorb misfortune intended for someone else was a well-known ritual technique in the ancient Near East.¹⁴ For purposes of comparison with terracotta plaques, it is important to note that bricks in some cases seem to have belonged to the same ontological category as humans and could stand

¹⁰ Note however the different reading of this line in RIME 3/1: 81, xix 3–5: “he [Gudea] looked with complete satisfaction towards the clay pit, the clay of the ‘crucible’ (of the brick).”

¹¹ Biggs 1974: 48, line 75; Stol (2000: 76) translates the city’s epithet as “brick of birth.”

¹² Leichty 1970, Tablet I, lines 33, 34, 45; Tablet II, line 65’; Tablet IV, line 39; OB omen: p. 202, lines 8–9. See also remarks in Stol 2000: 160–61.

¹³ Kilmer 1987: 212; Stol 2000: 29–32; Oppenheim *et al.* (1970: 32–33) noted the process of making offerings to “*Kūbu*-images” set up near a kiln that was to be used in glassmaking.

¹⁴ The clearest example of this technique occurs in the substitute king ritual during the Neo-Assyrian period, although there are many other instances of substitution as a means for transferring evil from an afflicted person to figurines of various substances or animals (Bottéro 1992: 138–55). See also the remarks of Moorey (2003: 11–13) on the use of clay figurines as either generalized substitutes, or as representations of particular people.

in for them. The importance of material and proper ritual preparation that activated the brick likely applied to terracottas as well.

It is important to note that the ubiquity of mundane objects made of clay did not diminish the power of clay as the raw material of life. A useful parallel in support of this view involves the use of pots in burials as containers for the corpse. An interesting argument has been made for interpreting the burials of very young or stillborn babies in either specially made pots or, more commonly, reused household wares – a widespread practice in Mesopotamia from the later Neolithic through Parthian periods – as symbolically returning the child to the uterus for protection and rebirth into another realm (Kulemann-Ossen and Novák 2000). Evidence for this interpretation includes the fetal position in which the skeletal remains are commonly found, with heads oriented toward the vessel opening, as in the last months of pregnancy (Kulemann-Ossen and Novák 2000: 124–26). A pot used in this fashion is convincingly equated with a pregnant uterus. However, this does not mean that every pot was considered to have this meaning while employed in the household for storage or cooking, but rather that the potential meaning was inherent in a pot's form and was activated by the placement of the corpse inside, and by the specific arrangement of the body. I would suggest that another crucial aspect of the burial pot's potential meaning as a substitute womb depended on the conceptual resonance of its material, clay.

Likewise, I argue that the symbolic resonance between wombs and molds, which both give shape to unformed clay, was a potential, not universal, aspect of the mold-made plaques. It could have been a meaningful trait of certain plaques whose imagery was explicitly connected with pregnancy and birth, such as the four plaques dating to the Isin-Larsa period depicting the birth goddess Nintu, shown with two heads emerging from her shoulders, nursing a baby and flanked by two fetuses or *kūbus* below and two womb symbols above; or the later example of three Canaanite plaques convincingly interpreted by Tallay Ornan as amulets for women pregnant with twins (Ornan 2007; for the Isin-Larsa plaques, see Ornan 2007: 220–21, with references). Indeed, Ornan (2007: 231) notes that while it is widely believed that the common availability of clay made it suitable for use by ordinary people to make objects expressing beliefs restricted to the lower strata of society, this idea is contradicted by the excavation of the Canaanite plaques from both elite and non-elite residential contexts. In the cases of the two plaques excavated from stratified contexts, both bear identical imagery and were probably made from the same mold. Ornan's observation that all levels of society drew upon the same apotropaic means for protecting women and newborns casts the material and manufacture of terracotta plaques in a new light.¹⁵ Perhaps it was precisely these features that were selected for their magical

¹⁵ Similarly, Moorey (1975: 98) stated that the amuletic role of terracotta plaques may have been usurped by cylinder seals during the later seventeenth-sixteenth century; although cylinder seals are usually more likely to be grouped with elite art and terracotta plaques with popular art, if the former replaced the latter it would imply similar audiences for both as propitious objects.

efficacy. Rather than being seen as mass-produced and cheap, the plaques could have been understood as objects made from the powerful medium of clay and brought forth like infants through a successful pregnancy.

Imagery: Objects of Desire, Objects of Self-identification

The nude female plaques under discussion have a long history of interpretation as fertility talismans: the gesture of presenting the breasts with the hands and unshamed display of sexual parts have been interpreted as direct references to the generative and nourishing power of female bodies. However, such an interpretation makes fertility the “excuse” for sexual display in a manner that speaks more to a specific modern prudishness than to ancient Babylonia (see discussion in Benzel, forthcoming, with references). In fact, sexual enjoyment was seen as a legitimate end in itself: for instance, the quite explicit potency incantations focus on sexual vigor and especially on the male partner’s erection, and do not mention any desire to increase the chances of successful conception.¹⁶ Fertility and eroticism were complementary rather than separate in the ancient Near East, as Bahrani (2001: 80–89) has demonstrated. Her reading of the nude female plaques as images of desirable women presented for male physical pleasure, supported by references to contemporary love poems, convincingly explains what must have been one of their primary functions.

Bahrani focused on the relationship between the male viewer and the image of femininity presented in the terracotta plaques as the idealized object of desire. How, then, did female viewers respond to these plaques? I believe we can identify several ways in which these plaques enacted, and reinforced, the culturally specific binary structure of gender of late third-early second millennium Mesopotamian society.

The work of Judith Butler (1993) and other feminist scholars (compare Wittig 1993) has presented a convincing case that sex and gender are not biological facts but are discursively produced, or materialized – a word with interesting resonance for the current investigation, with its focus on giving shape to matter – in an ongoing process. In her study of the depiction of the sexually alluring body of the king on the stele of Naram-Sin, Irene Winter (1996) notes the important role of displays of sexuality in constituting self-identification along gendered lines. She identified several processes at work in the viewer’s appreciative gazing at Naram-Sin: “for women, their subordination to desire and by men; for men, their fusion with authority at the same time as

¹⁶ Cf. Biggs 2002: 72: “There is no indication whatever [the Babylonian sexual potency texts] had any goal other than the sexual pleasure of the partners, that is, there is no evidence they were used to increase likelihood of pregnancy.” See also Biggs 1968.

they are subject to it” (I. Winter 1996: 21). The nude female plaques are very different types of objects, not least in that they were likely for private rather than public consumption, but both they and the aestheticized body of the king affected viewers through a display of sexual allure, in Akkadian the complex term *kuzbu* (a term discussed in depth by I. Winter 1996; Bahrani 2001; Benzal, forthcoming). Complementing the male viewers’ appreciative gazing at these idealized objects of desire, it could be argued that female viewers experienced a desire to identify themselves with this ideal image of feminine erotic allure, and in doing so to take their proper place in the Mesopotamian construction of gender in which eroticism was gendered as feminine.¹⁷ I suggest that, like male viewers of the aestheticized body of Naram-Sin, female viewers of these *kuzbu*-laden images fused themselves with the image and subjected themselves to, or accepted, the role it embodied.

Within this ideological framework, the power that was assigned to women was connected with their sexuality and physical attributes. Specifically, the vulva was a powerful index of femininity and stood in for sexual enjoyment and potency. Masculine power, on the other hand, became increasingly connected with military strength from the Early Dynastic period onwards, and it is perhaps not a coincidence that this development coincided with the increased popularity of nude female representations during the periods under discussion here (Asher-Greve 1997: 454). Feminine power could have strongly positive associations, but could also be associated with the uncanny. The erotic zones of the female body – mouth, vulva, and anus – are liminal, demarcating the areas where the body can be penetrated by or can seize another body (Assante 2002a). As thresholds, they are nexuses of magical power, and Julia Assante (2000: 242–55; 2002a) argues that terracotta plaques showing couples or women engaged in sexual acts were used as apotropaia because they drew on this power through the metaphor of sexuality.¹⁸ In her study of sex omens, Ann K. Guinan (1997: 465) notes that the liminality that characterizes human sexuality is charged with meaning, both auspicious and dangerous, because the “asymmetries of power and the binary construction of gender electrify the boundary between male and female bodies and constrain the way the erotic body is experienced and deployed.” Thus, one way in which power is enacted in the sex omens is through looking, an act that sets up the one who looks as the subject and the one who is viewed as the object. If the looking reinforces the dominant status of the male, who by looking takes possession

¹⁷ Bahrani 2001, 2002; note that Sumerian literature consistently shows women and girls taking the lead in sexual encounters, especially in the erotic songs concerning Inanna; see Leick 1994: 40–41, 56.

¹⁸ See however Graff (2012: 128–29) concerning two plaques from Kish that show a couple engaged in intercourse below a Humbaba head; the latter is clearly apotropaic in this instance, but it is not clear whether the sexual scene is also an apotropaion, or – more likely in my view – whether the dangerously liminal state of sex required protection in the form of the Humbaba head. Distinctions should also be made between depictions of sex between gods and sex between mortals, as it is not clear whether divine or human lovers were depicted on the plaques.

of what is his, that is, “his woman’s vagina,” the omen is auspicious; if it is a woman who looks at the penis of a man, the omen has a negative outcome because it reverses the subject/object relationship of man/woman through the sexualized gaze (Guinan 1997: 464–66). In this light, the plaques reinforce the place of the nude female, an index of femininity, as the object of the desiring gaze. The women who also gazed at these representations, rather than claiming a subject position through their gaze, could be seen as recognizing (representations of) themselves.¹⁹

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¹⁹ Mulvey 1975, 1989; see Bahrani 2001: 35–36 for an overview of literature on the Gaze in the context of ancient Near Eastern art.

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Amy Rebecca Gansell

Images and Conceptions of Ideal Feminine Beauty in Neo-Assyrian Royal Contexts, c. 883–627 BCE

Abstract: Taking into account Neo-Assyrian sculpture, seals, and jewelry, as well as carved ivory figures that embellished imported Levantine luxury goods, this essay focuses on images of women and the ideals of feminine beauty they embodied in elite Neo-Assyrian contexts. In order to recover ancient notions of beauty from visual sources, I incorporate comparative archaeological, textual, and ethnographic evidence. First, I identify visual consistencies indicative of physical characteristics of beauty. In addition to fulfilling cultural expectations of attractiveness, I propose that these external properties also manifested personal attributes of beauty, primarily: sexuality, fertility, and purity. I then interpret the role and reception of images of queens, goddesses, and idealized female figures in the Neo-Assyrian court, where they would have served as vital complements to male imagery and to the actual mortal men and women with whom they were juxtaposed.

Keywords: adornment, beauty, cognitive archaeology, dress, ethnoarchaeology, fertility, gardens, ivory, nudity, purity, queens, regalia, royal court, sexuality, tombs (Nimrud), women

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Introduction

In November 2009, young women from across Iraq competed in the Miss Baghdad contest, an event acclaimed in the Arabic press as bringing joy to “a nation thirsty for a happy event.” Based on her “form and figure,” “degree of culture,” and “comportment and personality,” the winner was “seated on the throne of beauty.”¹ While beauty pageants such as this are a product of the modern era, the appreciation of a beautiful woman would not have been unfamiliar in ancient Near Eastern society (Bahrani 1996; Winter 1995: 2573). For example, an inscription in Sennacherib's (r. 704–681 BCE)

¹ Footage of the pageant and an interview with the judges and winner (in Arabic by Ashraf al-'Azawi for *Russia Today*) are available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5o9bO44vkk> (accessed 9 June 2012).

Southwest Palace at Nineveh refers to his “beloved wife, whose features [the god] Belitili has made perfect above all women” (Layard MS C 55 verso – 56 verso, slab 4, lines 15–16) (Galter *et al.* 1986: 32; Reade 1987: 141–42). Indeed, in ancient as well as modern Iraq, feminine beauty appears to have been celebrated as a manifestation of state vitality.

This essay offers a culturally grounded analysis of ideal feminine beauty as it was visualized and integrated into Neo-Assyrian ideology. Concentrating on royal contexts dating from the reign of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) to that of Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE), I investigate images of women, with a focus on the artistic expression of “external” (that is, visible, tangible, and material) characteristics and “personal” (behavioral, biological, and conceptual) attributes of “ideal feminine beauty.” For the purposes of this study, I define “ideal feminine beauty” as the configuration of preferred visual traits and personal characteristics that are collectively recognized and positively valued in a given society. “Ideal feminine beauty” is a modern, Western construct of scholarly inquiry and was not literally articulated in ancient records. Yet the concept accurately characterizes a range of attitudes and visual depictions in elite Neo-Assyrian society.

Scholars have defined the aesthetics of the ideal ancient Near Eastern male image, which was characterized by erect posture, a muscular physique, and a long, dark, thick, curly beard and hairstyle. (Chapman 2004: 20–59; Cifarelli 1998: 214–15; Robins 1990: 115; Winter 1989, 1996). But a similar account of female beauty has not yet been fully articulated.² A synthesis of the ancient evidence presented here indicates that Neo-Assyrian conceptions of ideal feminine beauty entailed the external properties of a full face with large, cosmetically enhanced, dark eyes; thick, dark, coiffed hair; a voluptuous body; and ornate dress. Furthermore, I propose that sexuality (including sexual allure and availability), fertility, and moral and sexual purity comprised personal aspects of beauty, which could be cued through a woman’s outward appearance.³ In particular, I suggest that in the Neo-Assyrian court, images of women embodying ideal feminine beauty would have complemented images of idealized men by contributing to a “rhetoric of abundance” that privileged women as the reproductive centers of the empire (Winter 2003).

² Bahrani (1996: 3, 7–13; 2002: 55–56) establishes a culturally specific model for the investigation of feminine beauty, but scholars have mostly considered the reasons for the seeming scarcity of ancient Near Eastern female imagery and for our limited scholarly engagement with it (Albenda 1987; Asher-Greve 2000; Bahrani 2001; Cifarelli 1998: 220; Ornan 2002; Winter 1987).

³ It is not clear whether a woman could be outwardly attractive if she lacked inner qualities of beauty. For example, in the myth of Enlil and Sud (ES), Enlil is struck by Sud’s physical appearance, but he mistakes her for a morally and sexually impure prostitute (ES A16). Sud, however, turns out to be a virtuous candidate for his affection. In this case, Enlil’s desires might have been piqued by outward allusions to Sud’s personal attributes of beauty. Alternatively, this tale could warn that not all physically attractive women are truly “beautiful.” For the translation of the poem of Enlil and Sud cited throughout this essay, see Black *et al.* 2004: 106–11.

Methodology and Evidence

The field of cognitive archaeology argues that not only human actions, but also human ideas, can be preserved in art and artifacts, which served as “material symbols” of a collective consciousness (Renfrew 2012). This hypothesis undergirds my investigation of Neo-Assyrian notions of ideal feminine beauty, an effort that entails the recuperation and reconstruction of an aesthetic that was only indirectly preserved through art, dress, and texts. I consider the consistent representation of particular physical characteristics, styles of dress, and iconographic motifs to demonstrate that artists emulated and perpetuated a common prototype when depicting archetypal women.⁴ Parallels with archaeologically preserved assemblages of royal dress and ancient textual sources support and expand interpretations of the artistic record. In addition, comparisons with ethnographic evidence help to decipher antiquity’s often ambiguous and fragmentary visual, material, and written sources.

The corpus of art under consideration incorporates works of Neo-Assyrian manufacture that depict queens and goddesses as well as Levantine ivory sculptures of divine and archetypal women that decorated furniture and portable objects collected and displayed in Assyrian contexts.⁵ Royal Neo-Assyrian art portraying women includes reliefs carved into cliffs, stelae, palace orthostats, statues, seals, and jewelry (Albenda 1987; Ornan 2002) (Figs. 1–6). These works were finely crafted, made of precious materials, and/or monumental in scale. Their luxury and status as royal commissions affirm their significance in the elite milieu, where they would have been physically and/or conceptually juxtaposed with living queens (Aker 2007; Winter 2008).

Although Neo-Assyrian images of women were relatively rare, elite spaces nonetheless displayed ideal feminine beauty in relative abundance: hundreds of highly detailed, ivory sculptures of women embellished royal possessions that originated from the Levant (Ciafaloni 2009: 308–309; Herrmann 2008; Thomason 2004: 159–60; Thomason 2005: 120–50) (Figs. 7–8).⁶ These works reflected various Levantine artistic styles and iconographic motifs. However, the figures’ voluptuous forms, adornment, and floral imagery intersected and harmonized with Assyrian traditions, indicating aspects of feminine beauty that would have resonated with the ideals of their Assyrian

⁴ For a discussion of the transmission of images from conceptual prototype to designers to artists/craftsmen, see Roaf 1990. On artisans’ aesthetic responsibilities, see Sasson 1990: 22–24.

⁵ Here “the Levant” refers to present-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria west of the Euphrates River, and Turkey south of the Taurus Mountains from the Hatay to the Euphrates.

⁶ Many of the Levantine ivories discovered at Nimrud were found in palace treasuries. This has prompted a theory that ivory-embellished Levantine objects were hoarded as wealth but were not used by the Assyrians (Herrmann and Laidlaw 2009; Herrmann and Millard 2003; Suter 2011: 223). Yet, there are many other explanations for their storage contexts: they might have been placed in treasuries for the sake of security prior to the sack of the palace, or the preserved objects might have been excess that were not looted in antiquity, because they were secured in storage.



Figure 1: Detail of the queen (probably Libbali-Sharrat) on the “Garden Party” relief. Nineveh, c. 645 BCE; stone; h. of relief 58.42 cm. The British Museum, BM 124920. © Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY.

consumers (Gansell 2008: 296–300).⁷ The foreign origin of these sculptures is also of consequence to this study.⁸ Assyrian elites were fascinated with the Levant for its mountains, aromatic cedars, lush terrains, and Mediterranean coast. They might have attempted to conjure the region by decorating their palaces with Levantine luxury goods (Cogan 1984; Thomason 2004: 157–61; Thomason 2005: 150). In addition to importing ivory products, Assyrian kings constructed gardens evocative of Levantine landscapes, and members of the Assyrian ruling class appear to have taken elite Levantine women as wives (Dalley 1998: 83–84, 94–96; Dalley 2004: 394–96; Dalley

⁷ Some sculptures were carved in Egyptianizing styles and bore Egyptianizing iconography (Ciafaloni 2009). The Assyrians might have especially appreciated these fashionable goods for their exotic designs and their reference to a land they envisioned themselves dominating (Feldman 2004: 148–49; Thomason 2004: 160–61).

⁸ On the Neo-Assyrian display of foreign goods as “political trophies,” see Albenda 1977; Thomason 2004; Thomason 2005: 148–50.



Figure 2: “Garden Party” relief portraying Assurbanipal dining in a garden with his queen (probably Libbali-Sharrat). Nineveh, c. 645 BCE; stone; h. 58.42 cm, w. 139.7 cm. The British Museum, BM 124920. © The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY.

2005; Dalley 2008: 171–72; Melville 2004: 40, n. 16, 47–48; RIMA 3: 239–40; Thomason 2001; Thomason 2005: 173–76; Weinfeld 1991: 99–103). To the Assyrians, then, the beauty of the women depicted in ivory might have evoked fecund landscapes and prized brides.⁹

The tombs of lavishly attired royal women discovered beneath the domestic quarters of Nimrud’s Northwest Palace support the visual evidence for ideal feminine beauty during the ninth and eighth centuries BCE.¹⁰ Among the deceased was Shalmaneser V’s (r. 726–722 BCE) wife, whom inscriptions identify by two names: “Yaba” and “Banitu.” “Yaba” was most likely her native, Levantine name (based on the Hebrew root *yph*); “Banitu” (derived from *banû*), its semantic equivalent in Akkadian, might have been given to her when she married into the Assyrian court (Dalley 1998; Dalley 2004: 394–96; Dalley 2008: 172). Both names mean “well-formed,” probably in reference to a desirable appearance and persona (Dalley 1998: 94). Along with inscriptions, the adornment and grave goods idealizing the Nimrud deceased conveyed their personal identities and royal status. Their dress could have perpetuated their beauty over the course of their lives, during their funerals, and, maybe, symbolically, in the afterlife. Tomb artifacts also provide tangible evidence for the

⁹ The relationship between Neo-Assyrian royal men and the territory of the Levant and the brides and sculptures of idealized female figures emerging from this land is complex. In Neo-Assyrian imperial ideology, landscape and topography seem to have been sexualized and conceived of as feminine; territorial control might therefore be compared to male possession of the female body (Marcus 1995: 200–202).

¹⁰ Four tombs contained the burials of men, women, and children. Hussein and Suleiman 2000 is the most comprehensive, illustrated record of the excavations. Also see Curtis *et al.* 2008; Damerji 1999; Fadhil 1990; Oates and Oates 2001: 78–90.



Figure 3: Relief plaque portraying the queen/queen mother, Naqia. No provenience, 7th cen. BCE; bronze; h. 33 cm, w. 31 cm. Louvre, AO 20185. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

manner in which palace women enhanced their appearance through cosmetics and dress, while the floral imagery embellishing their belongings supports the social value placed on female fertility. In a mortuary setting, this imagery might have referred concurrently to the cycle of life.

When compared to visual and archaeological evidence, texts can confirm, emphasize, and describe the significance of various aspects of beauty. Analyzed here are Neo-Assyrian historical and archival documents (such as royal inscriptions, dowry lists, palace inventories, and omens) as well as literary texts known during the Neo-Assyrian period, including the *Gilgamesh Epic* (GE), *Ishtar's Descent* (IshD), and the myths of Nergal and Ereshkigal (NE), of Nabu and Tashmetu (NT), and of Enlil and Sud (ES).¹¹

¹¹ For the first-millennium BCE version of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, see George 2003: 531–735; for *Ishtar's Descent*, see Foster 2005: 498–505; for the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, see Foster 2005: 512–24; for



Figure 4: Stele portraying Assurbanipal's queen, Liballi-Sharrat. Assur, c. 669–626 BCE; limestone; h. 65 cm, w. 70 cm. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany, VAM 8847. © BPK, Berlin/Art Resource, NY.

Copies of many of these texts were found in Neo-Assyrian palace libraries. The earlier Mesopotamian literary works of Inanna's Descent (InD), the Dumuzi-Inanna love lyrics (DI), and the Letter of Ludingira to his Mother (LL) are also relevant to this discussion, because the ideas they convey demonstrate elements of continuity with those espoused in the Neo-Assyrian period (for example, see Nissinen 1998: 624).¹²

Finally, incorporated throughout much of this analysis are ethnographic studies of communities in Iraq and the Levant dating from the nineteenth century to the present. This evidence offers models and interpretive paradigms for the expression, enhancement, and appreciation of ancient beauty (Gansell 2007a: 454–55; Kramer and Kramer 2001; Winter 2000: 151). Although current phenomena should not be construed as a direct vestige of ancient Near Eastern realities, the possibility remains that physically

the Nabu and Tashmetu lyrics, see Foster 2005: 944–46, and for the myth of Enlil and Sud, see Black *et al.* 2004: 106–11.

12 There are no known first millennium BCE copies of these works. Inanna's Descent is related to the Akkadian composition, Ishtar's Descent (Katz 1995: 228–29; Katz 2003: 257–58). For Inanna's Descent, see Black *et al.* 2004: 65–76; for the Dumuzi-Inanna texts, see Sefati 1998: 120–323; for the Letter of Ludingira to his Mother, see Black *et al.* 2004: 190–92.



Figure 5: Statue of a nude female figure, probably the goddess Ishtar. Nineveh, c. 1073–1056 BCE; limestone; h. 92.5 cm. The British Museum, BM 124963. © The Trustees of the British Museum/Art Resource, NY.

similar populations in environmentally analogous lands might share some concepts of feminine beauty, albeit filtered through millennia of cultural change.

Properties of Ideal Feminine Beauty

Neo-Assyrian royal art depicting foreign female prisoners provides a visual category of intentionally non-idealized figures. The captives, who were probably the daughters and wives of enemy rulers, are portrayed unadorned and sometimes barefoot and uncoiffed (Cifarelli 1998: 218–23, figs. 17–18; Curtis and Tallis 2008: 35, 118–19, figs. 17–18). In contrast, Assyrian queens are shown with styled hair and sumptuously outfitted from head to toe (Fig. 1). In addition to introducing a few basic features of Assyrian concepts of beauty, the comparison between images of captives and queens suggests the purposeful representation of attractiveness.

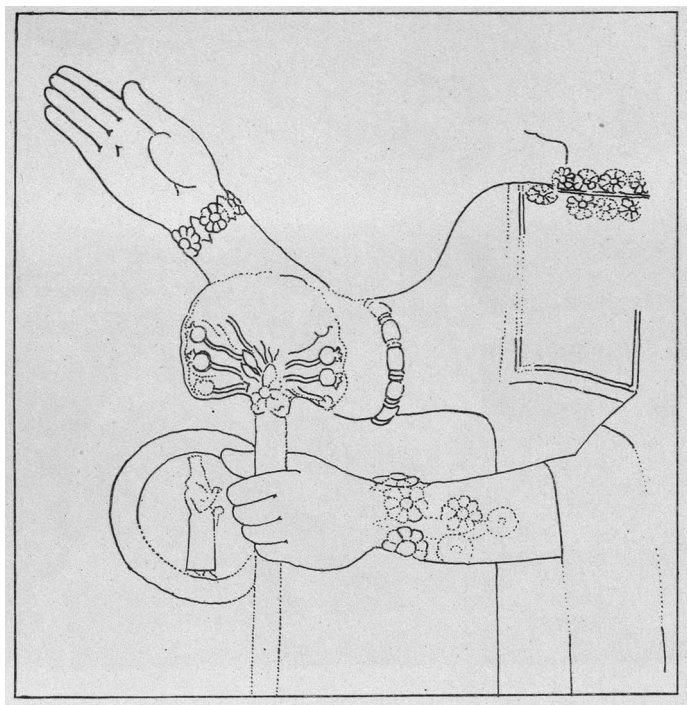


Figure 6: Line drawing detail of *in situ* cliff relief probably portraying a conflation of the goddesses Ishtar and Mulissu. Bavian, Iraq, c. 689 BCE; h. of goddess including crown 640 cm. Bachmann 1927, pl. 12.

Visual evidence for images of ideal feminine beauty in Neo-Assyrian contexts derives from depictions of royal and divine women, as well as from archetypal figures whose roles might have ranged from decorative to apotropaic (Gubel 2005: 129–30). Iconography generally clarifies their royal, divine, or archetypal status, and regional styles differentiate the cultural origins of the works.¹³ Despite these variations, aspects of beauty are generally consistent.¹⁴ Among large- and small-scale, local and imported images of women, the features receiving the most attention by craftsmen, and presumably by beholders, seem to have been the eyes, hair, and dress. Quantitative

¹³ Levantine ivory figures might have been understood as royal or divine “types,” rather than particular queens or goddesses. Gubel (2005: 129–33) has proposed that some Levantine ivory figures depict specific deities, but these might only have been recognizable to viewers acquainted with Levantine culture.

¹⁴ Presenting a significant exception to the usual standards of feminine beauty discussed here, Assyrian images of Ishtar in her martial aspect portray the goddess wearing a masculine garment that reveals a muscular leg.

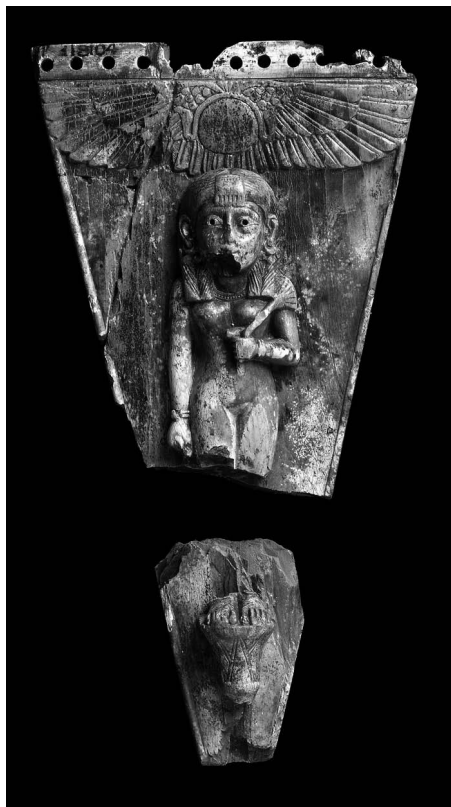


Figure 7: Horse frontlet portraying a nude female figure holding a lotus. Nimrud, 9th–8th cen. BCE; ivory; h. 3.81 cm. The British Museum, BM 118104. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

analysis of iconographic and anthropometric data preserved in the Levantine ivory sculptures reveals that variations in the depiction of hair and eyes play a primary role in distinguishing regional carving styles (Gansell *et al.* 2007: 489). This result substantiates the ancient visual impact of these features and their potential role in signifying attractiveness. Aspects of the eyes, hair, and dress would have operated together with other external characteristics and personal attributes to form a comprehensive prototype of ideal feminine beauty. Elements of beauty, however, are presented here according to four organizational categories: the head, the body, dress, and personal attributes.

The Head

Both the Assyrians and their enemies, who employed similar forms of corporal punishment and execution, considered the head and images of it to be especially vulnerable and vital sites (Albenda 1977: 28–33; Bahrani 2004; Bahrani 2008: 23–23, 35–41; Bonatz 2004; Dolce 2004). Damage to Assyrian art by enemies aimed to



Figure 8: Sculpture of a female face known as the “Mona Lisa of Nimrud.” Nimrud, 8th cen. BCE; ivory; h. 16 cm. Iraq National Museum, museum number not known, excavation number ND 2250. © Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY.

disempower figures by mutilating the face (Bahrani 2008: 51; Nylander 1999: 74–77). This practice is evident on the “Garden Party” relief from Assurbanipal’s North Palace at Nineveh, which depicts the decapitated head of the Elamite leader hanging from a tree amidst the scene of a royal banquet (Barnett 1975b: 169–71) (Fig. 2).¹⁵ In this unique scene, the king Assurbanipal (r. 668–627 BCE) and his queen, presumably Liballi-sharrat, are seated beneath a canopy of grapevines, surrounded by incense, attendants, and musicians. The faces of the king and queen have been brutally damaged, perhaps by Elamite soldiers who ransacked the palace in retribution for the execution of their leader.

¹⁵ This relief, excavated from Room S¹ of Assurbanipal’s North Palace at Nineveh, might have decorated a private portico (Albenda 1976: 51–55). For background and a recent interpretation, see Ataç (2012). Note that the attendants and musicians are either women (Albenda 1976: 61, 67; Albenda 1998; Macgregor 2012: 33–36) or eunuchs (Schmidt-Colinet 1997). Schmidt-Colinet (1997) also identifies the figure seated at the king’s table as a high-ranking eunuch from Babylon, rather than the queen.

Anthropometric analysis of the faces of Levantine ivory sculptures of women, which visually emphasize the head, indicates that regional types might be distinguished by the relative size of facial features in comparison to the length of the face (Gansell 2008: 87). This suggests that ancient carvers and viewers might have been culturally conditioned to observe the vertical proportions of a face, which, in turn, might have underlain models of beauty. The placement of features on a horizontal axis varies considerably, and was therefore probably not an established characteristic of attractiveness.

Across ancient Near Eastern art, female faces were consistently rendered as plumper and broader than male faces. In the “Garden Party” relief, for example, the queen’s face is discernibly fuller than the ruler’s bearded visage (Fig. 2). A soft, round face indicated gender, and it was likely also a specific characteristic of feminine beauty.¹⁶ Images of elite women emphasize the fullness of the face through distinctively chubby cheeks, fleshy jaws, and bulbous, sometimes “double” chins. This is exemplified by a bronze relief portraying Naqia, the wife of Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BCE) and the queen mother of Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BCE), as well as by an inscribed stele that depicts Assurbanipal’s queen, Liballi-sharrat (Andrae 1913: 6–8, pl. X; Kohler and Ungnad 1913: no. 17; Macgregor 2012: 109–18; Melville 1999: 25–26; Parrot and Nougayrol 1956) (Figs. 3–4). Many Levantine ivory figures accentuated these traits as well. For instance, swirls in the grain of the ivory embellish the full cheeks of the well-preserved sculpture nicknamed the “Mona Lisa of Nimrud” (Fig. 8).¹⁷ When only the face is represented or when the physique is not discernable beneath a woman’s clothing, a full face could hint at the presence of a voluptuous body, which, itself, might have been indicative of health and reproductive fertility.

Women’s faces are not explicitly described in ancient Near Eastern literature, but ethnographic evidence gives possible perspectives on the assessment of their attractiveness. With reference to facial fullness and/or radiance, twentieth-century Levantine folk songs praise a woman’s face resembling the “full moon” and extol the cheeks and the “round shape” of a “broad face” (Sonbol 1994: 57–58; Stephan 1922: 244–45, 267, 271). Furthermore, Fernea (1965: 160) reported that an Iraqi woman worried that as her heart grew “narrow and cramped” with loneliness, her face had become unattractively thin.

Eyes are the most conspicuous facial feature in Mesopotamian figural art, and the anthropometric analysis of Levantine ivory sculptures mathematically confirms a consistently oversized ratio of eye-height to face-length (Gansell 2008: 87). Exaggeration may be interpreted as idealization, which would be motivated by cultural values of attractiveness. In ivory sculpture, eyes and eyebrows were often inlaid with dark

¹⁶ Eunuchs are also characterized by pudgy faces, but this essay focuses on the feminine beauty of biological women.

¹⁷ Herrmann and Laidlaw 2009: pls. 104–105; Mallowan 1966: 128–35, fig. 71, pl. II; for examples of other ivories, see Barnett 1975a: pl. LXX, nos. S183–S184.

materials or blackened with pigment, thereby further emphasizing them (Fig. 8). Although artistic conventions for depicting eyes are not unique to female figures, the specific role of eyes in feminine beauty is supported by references in amorous literature: for example, Enlil says to Sud, “Kiss me, my lady of most beautiful eyes” (ES A25). Ethnographers have documented that women’s eyes are the most habitually discussed facial feature; beautiful eyes are large, black, and pool-like (Jaussen 1927: 50; Ochsenschlager 2004: 20; Sonbol 1994: 58; Stephan 1922: 212). One ethnographic account records a colloquial description of beautiful eyes as “little coffee cups” (Bauer 1903: 86). Similarly, in the ancient love lyrics of Nabu and Tashmetu, Nabu uses the metaphor of “lapis [lazuli] cups” to refer to Tashmetu’s eyes (NT rev. 8) (George 2003: 945, n. 2).

Ancient Near Eastern art delineates the upper and lower eyelids, which might originally have been painted black, as if the eyes were outlined in kohl (a lead- or antimony-based cosmetic). The eyes of the “Mona Lisa of Nimrud” sculpture preserve their black outline (Fig. 8). Confirming a Neo-Assyrian practice of lining the eyes, kohl containers and applicators were excavated from the queens’ tombs at Nimrud (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 110, 128).¹⁸ Mesopotamian literature predating the Neo-Assyrian period also demonstrates the appeal of painted eyes. The goddess Inanna’s eye makeup is named “Let a man come; let him come!” (InD 22), and an epithet of Inanna calls her “the kohl of [her lover] Dumuzi” (DI V 2) (Pientka 2002: 511). Today kohl is a documented aspect of traditional beauty from the Mediterranean to India. An ethnographic study in Palestine during the 1920s reported that women with naturally large, dark eyes were referred to in Arabic as *kahla* (the feminine nominative form of the word “kohl”) and that wearing kohl was said to make a woman appear as beautiful as a veritable *kahla* (Jaussen 1927: 70–1; Stol 1995: 124).

Hairstyle too is a highly descriptive aspect of appearance. In Neo-Assyrian art, male, female, and eunuch figures display similar curly coiffures (Fig. 2).¹⁹ Suggesting the aesthetic significance of elaborately styled hair, sculptors delineated individual strands and coils. Levantine figures display a foreign typology of hairstyles, but they are also wavy or curly, at least shoulder-length, and rendered in precise detail (Gansell 2008: 49–53) (Figs. 7–8). Three-dimensional nude ivory figures tend to have especially long hair, potentially linking luxuriant hairstyles to the eroticized female body (Bahrani 1996: 9–10; Barnett 1975a: pl. LXXV, no. S211).

18 In addition to beautifying, kohl has medicinal and hygienic uses. Studies on modern kohl indicate that it treats redness, burning, and inflammation of the eyes; moreover, its mineral components are toxic to bacteria carried by water and flies. In Iraqi and Levantine folk traditions, kohl is believed to strengthen eyesight and deflect the “evil eye” (Boucheman 1937: 32; Drower 1923: 289; Granqvist 1950: 99; Hazzaa and Krahn 1995: 83–88; Jaussen 1927: 70–71; Stark 1946 [1937]: 214–15).

19 In the Gilgamesh Epic, the uncivilized figure of Enkidu has long, shaggy tresses (GE I 106–107), and late Neo-Assyrian art portrays Arab enemies with long, straight hair (Bahrani 2006: 57). Carefully curled hair, therefore, might have indicated that a person was not only Assyrian, but also civilized.

No hair or wigs were preserved in the Nimrud tombs, but a gold headdress from Coffin 2 in Tomb III with an especially broad, rigid diameter (24 cm) might have been intended to be worn over a thickly coiffed hairstyle (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 313, pic. 159). Wooden and ivory combs found in the coffins further indicate a culture of grooming and styling the hair (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 128). Neo-Assyrian texts do not describe hairstyles, but a second-millennium BCE poem demonstrates the importance of styled hair as part of a woman's self-presentation. Before meeting her lover, Inanna explains that her hair "was disheveled – I straightened it, my locks were loosened – I tightened them [and] tossed them to the sides of [my] nape" (DI C 3–17).

Ethnographic evidence emphasizes the innate qualities of female hair, rather than the artificial features of coiffures. Iraqi and Levantine men and women stated particular regard for long, shiny, black hair (Fernea 1965: 137–38; Jaussen 1927: 50, 52; Ochsenchlagler 2004: 20; Stephan 1922: 268). Archaeological finds indicate that the hair of some ivory figures was overlaid with gold foil, a technique that might have been intended to impart a pleasing luster (Herrmann 1989: 88; Hrouda 1962: 9–10, 21, pl. 9, figs. 46–48, pl. 12, figs. 80–86). While no surviving Neo-Assyrian image of a woman has visible pigment, painted male figures have black hair (for example, Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936: pl. XLIX). Women's hair, too, would probably have been painted black, such as on the Levantine work, the "Mona Lisa of Nimrud" (Fig. 8).

The Body

The use of polished ivory as a favored medium for sculpting and displaying figures suggests a fondness for a fair, glowing complexion, and it might have conveyed flawlessness and purity.²⁰ Physical cleanliness is not evident in art, but it is discussed in the literature of the Neo-Assyrian period. For example, the goddesses Ereshkigal (NE iv 5) and Tashmetu (NT rev. 7) bathe before entering their lover's bedchamber. In the *Gilgamesh Epic*, Ninsun's ritual bath is also described. Before making offerings to Shamash, she washes with water scented with the purificants of tamarisk and soapwort (GE III 37–38) (George 2003: 811).

Archaeological evidence supports the significance and luxury of personal cleanliness and grooming, as well as an appreciation for luxury toiletry items. In addition to

²⁰ Millennia of burial have darkened the ivories illustrated here, Figs. 7 and 8 (Herrmann and Laidlaw 2009: 216). Revealing a Neo-Assyrian desire for shiny, white sculptures, an inscription on a votive statue of Shalmaneser III (r. 854–824 BCE) identifies its material as "polished, shining, precious alabaster;" however, it is actually made of calcite or limestone (Gates 1990: 29–30; Kinnier-Wilson 1962: 91). To the Assyrians, this was presumably an ancient aesthetic trope. Second-millennium BCE literature also figuratively describes attractive bodies as carved of alabaster (DI B 31–32, DI Y 45–57, LL 30).

combs and cosmetic tools and containers, the Nimrud tombs preserved boxes, jars, bottles, and bowls that would have held liquids and salves.²¹ Small containers and larger vessels were discovered together with mirrors; this assemblage might have formed a female toilette set.²² For example, inside the Tomb II sarcophagus, a bronze mirror with an ivory-inlaid handle was found with a gold bowl that held eleven tiny gold bottles (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 245, pic. 40, 264, pic. 58, 265, pic. 59; Oates and Oates 2001: 83). A larger gold flask on a chain, which matches the form of the small bottles, was found nearby (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 262, pic. 56).

With regard to the shape of the female body, abundant visual and comparative evidence indicates a fondness for a voluptuous form. Neo-Assyrian art depicts royal women as slightly smaller and more curvaceous than their male counterparts (Figs. 2–3). Ideal female physiques, however, are most readily analyzed through positively coded nude imagery that represents goddesses and fantastic or archetypal figures (Asher-Greve and Sweeny 2006: 150–51).²³ Female nudes display round breasts and full hips and thighs. This body type is exemplified by what is probably a cult statue of the goddess found in the Ishtar Temple at Nineveh (Baharani 2001: 89–91) (Fig. 5). The sculpture dates to the early Neo-Assyrian period (the reign of Assur-bel-kala [r. 1073–1056 BCE]), but the body is of the same distinctive type that is represented centuries later in small-scale art, such as seals and plaques (al-Gailani Werr 2008: 155–56, figs. 19-b–19-e; Collon 2001: 91, pl. XII, no. 155; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 215, pic. 13; Mahmoud 2008: 98, fig. 12-x; Mallowan and Davies 1970: pl. XL, no. 170).

Many Levantine ivory sculptures also portray nude women (Fig. 7). Their bodies are curvaceous but usually slimmer than Assyrian figures. Evoking eroticism and fertility, their torsos are rendered in considerable detail (Baharani 2001: 86–88; Orthmann 1975: 295, no. 170). On some examples, parallel arcs etched below their delicately modeled navels indicate creases or folds in the flesh, and the nipples, pubic hair, and vulva are often articulated (Barnett 1975a: pls. LXXIV–LSSVI, nos. S207, S211, S215–S221, S223–S225). The potential meaning of these features to Assyrian audiences is revealed by physiognomic omen texts that predict fertility based on characteristics of women's navels and nipples (K6190⁺: 189; K8627⁺: 169, 188–89; VAT 9973: 169) (Böck 2000: 38, 122, 162–63, 175, 204; Böck 2010: 202–203).

21 Similarly shaped jars excavated from Egyptian sites bear inscriptions identifying their contents (Manniche 1999: 86–88, 92–93, 109–110).

22 In ancient Near Eastern culture, mirrors were associated with mortal and divine women (Albenda 1985). Naqia's mirror might have signified queenship, and/or it could have been related to the scene's cultic nature (Macgregor 2012: 116; Melville 1999: 15). Mirrors also served as divine attributes and votive offerings (Macgregor 2012: 114–15; Nemet-Nejat 1993: 164, 167–68; Ornan 2002: 472).

23 While Neo-Assyrian art sometimes depicts male captives in the nude, female captives are always clothed (Cifarelli 1998: 219–20).

Literature praises the female body in figurative terms, particularly through reference to the beauty of nature in terms of animals, precious stones, and fruit. In Nabu and Tashmetu's love lyrics, Nabu compares Tashmetu's thighs to a gazelle, her ankles to an apple, her heels to obsidian, and her entire being to a lapis lazuli tablet (NT rev. 1–4). In a second-millennium BCE composition, Ludingira uses similar metaphors to describe his mother's physical attractiveness (LL 21–31), reproductive fertility (LL 32–39), joyfulness (LL 40–46), and sweet fragrance (LL 47–52). Perhaps these comparisons express that a figure is so quintessentially beautiful that she cannot be described in human terms. Furthermore, as has been suggested with regard to ancient Hebrew and Egyptian literature, the metaphoric distance between the descriptions and referents might have been intended to produce “greater psychological arousal” and thereby intensify the audience's “aesthetic pleasure” in the subjects (Fox 1983: 226).

Skeletal analysis of women buried at Nimrud who died between the approximate ages of 20 and 55 suggests that they were sedentary and suffered joint diseases (Müller-Karpe *et al.* 2008: 143–44, 148; Schultz and Kunter 1998: 125–26). This could have been related to the heavy jewelry and ornamented robes they wore. It also implies that they were overweight (by modern Western standards), a characteristic that might have been related to ancient cultural preferences for voluptuousness. Yet, while ideal physiques would have been inspired by nature, the individual physical realities of elite women would not necessarily have equated to ideals of beauty. For example, ethnographers have observed that wedding songs praise large breasts and plump hips and thighs regardless of a bride's physical maturity or actual body type (Gansell 2007a: 454; Jaussen 1927: 51–52; Ochsenschlager 2004: 20; Sonbol 1994: 58; Stephan 1922: 237, 243–45, 253–54, 263, 267).

Dress

While the female body itself was esteemed, dress also played a fundamental role in Neo-Assyrian feminine beauty.²⁴ Overall, the visually attested assemblage of ideal female dress includes headgear, earrings, a necklace, bracelets, a garment, and footwear. It is not clear, however, whether the Assyrians distinguished the appreciation of dress as a component of beauty from the recognition of a woman as beautiful on account of her identity, which was defined by her dress. In fact, aspects of identity might have been fused with properties of beauty. Elements of royal and divine regalia, then, might have been markers of beauty as well.²⁵

²⁴ Creating a comprehensive visual effect, “dress” refers to headgear, jewelry, hand-held accessories, and garments.

²⁵ On issues of fashion, dress, and identity in Mesopotamia during the third millennium BCE, see Baadsgaard, this volume; Gansell 2007b.

In Neo-Assyrian art, even unclothed figures typically wore some elements of dress.²⁶ For example, the nude and winged female figure depicted on a stamp seal from Tomb I at Nimrud wears a feather-topped crown, and a fringed textile hangs behind her (al-Gailani Werr 2008: 155, fig. 19-a; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 215, pic. 13). Especially on a nude figure, select items of dress might have civilized and eroticized the body (Bahrani 2002: 55; Lambert 1987: 28; Nissinen 1998: 608–609; Westenholz 1992: 382, 385, 387). In the myth of Nabu and Tashmetu, before love-making, Tashmetu asks Nabu to adorn her: “My lord, put an earring on me; let me give you pleasure...” (NT 13–15).

Communicating beauty, identity, and eroticism, dress could increase a goddess’s power and charm (Asher-Greve and Sweeney 206: 140). The Descent of Ishtar dramatizes the relationship between dress and divine power (Katz 1995: 224; Katz 2003: 259–60). When the goddess enters the netherworld to usurp it, she is stripped of her crown, earrings, neck beads, breast ornament, girdle, bracelets, anklets, and garment (IshD 41–62). As a result, she loses her divine powers. During this period, while she is unadorned, powerless, and absent from the living world, no man or animal can impregnate a female (IshD 76–79). Fertility is restored when Ishtar is revived and gradually given back her empowering (and probably sexually symbolic) regalia as she exits through the successive gates of the netherworld (IshD 118–30) (Katz 2003: 260).

Certain aspects of Neo-Assyrian dress were neither gender specific nor exclusively royal or divine but appear to have conveyed distinctly Assyrian identity. For example, the rock-cut relief portraying Ishtar/Mulissu at Bavian depicts the goddess wearing a rosette necklace and bracelet; a floral pattern extends up her left arm (Bachmann 1927: 9–10, pl. 12) (Fig. 6). In the “Garden Party” relief from Nineveh, the king, queen, and some of the attendants are adorned in the same type of rosette bracelets as are worn by the Bavian goddess and other male and female divine figures (Macgregor 2012: 91) (Fig. 2). Gold finger rings of the same design were excavated from the Nimrud tombs (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 294, pic. 87). The tombs also yielded two fiber tassels and thousands of gold garment ornaments in the forms of flowers and knobby triangles that might represent clusters of grapes (Crowfoot 2008: 151; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 241, pic. 36, 302, pic. 94, 306–307, pics. 98–99). These items correspond to embellishments illustrated on the garments of rulers, queens, and deities (Canby 1971; Guralnick 2004; Thomason 2010: 200–203) (Fig. 2). Decorated, tasseled robes are even shown in small-scale works, such as on a gold pendant from Tomb III at Nimrud that portrays Ishtar and a female worshipper (al-Gailani Werr 2008: 157, fig. 19-g; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 349, pic. 140).

²⁶ Although the nude cult statue from the Ishtar Temple at Nineveh does not preserve any adornment, a crown or jewelry might have been depicted on its missing hands, feet, or head. It is also possible that garments and ornaments dedicated to the goddess could have served as her dress. For a discussion of jewelry dedicated to goddesses by Naqia/Zakutu, see Melville 1999: 43–44.

The Nimrud tombs also preserved elements of dress that are comparable to adornment depicted on the Levantine ivory sculptures found at the site (Fig. 7). Such objects include a diadem with a forehead ornament from which pomegranate-shaped pendants dangle, necklaces featuring eyestone medallions, crescent earrings with budlike fringes, and pairs of anklets and bracelets (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 202, pic. 2, 224, pic. 23, 229, pic. 28, 249, pic. 44, 250, pic. 45, 308, pic. 100, 338, pic. 129, 400, pic. 184, 403, pic. 186). It is unknown whether any of the objects in the Nimrud tombs were part of foreign dowries, royal gifts, or tribute.²⁷ It is possible that some jewelry was manufactured in Assyria but inspired by Levantine dress, or it might have reflected variations of pan-Near Eastern fashion. The presence of foreign or foreign-style jewelry in the Nimrud tombs raises political questions beyond the scope of this study.²⁸ However, in addition to expressing imperialism, this culturally ambiguous category of adornment implies an aesthetic of exoticism or cosmopolitanism embedded in royal Assyrian female dress and feminine beauty that might have challenged and transcended political boundaries (Gansell 2012: 20–22).²⁹

Ideal dress would have sheathed the beautiful woman, in front and back, from top to bottom, in gold. The gleaming, kinetic elements might have endowed her with the divine and royal attribute of “awe-inspiring radiance” (*melammu* in Akkadian; *me-lam₂* in Sumerian) (Cassin 1968: 4–6, 25–26, 65–82; Garelli 1990: 176; Winter 1994: 124–27). A woman’s dress would also have covered her in motifs of fruits, flowers, buds, and leaves. In addition, banded-agate eyestones, which probably had an apotropaic function, were frequently incorporated into jewelry that covered the vulnerable sites of the head, spine, throat, and wrists (Collon 2010: 152, 155; Nasrabadi 1999: 15–16; Thomsen 1992: 26).³⁰ Together, the radiance and embellishments of women’s dress might have accentuated and protected her personal attributes of beauty, such as sexuality, fertility, and moral and sexual purity.

²⁷ Examples of another type of crescent earrings depicted on Levantine ivory sculptures have been excavated from the Nimrud tombs (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 393 [printed as “493”], pic. 177; Musche 1992: 209–210). Neo-Assyrian plaques depict the presentation of similar earrings as royal tribute, suggesting that some earrings from the tombs might have been foreign luxuries (Mallowan and Davies 1970: pl. XXIV, no. 76, pl. XXIX, no. 100).

²⁸ For example, Collon (2010: 158–61) has suggested that foreign craftsmen corrupted the Neo-Assyrian iconography on a pair of bracelets as a “message of revolt.”

²⁹ Feldman (2004) and Thomason (2004: 160–61) have discussed similar dynamics with regard to Neo-Assyrian perspectives on Egypt and Egyptian art and luxury goods.

³⁰ Clayden (2009) argues that Mesopotamian eyestones were decorative and did not have an apotropaic function.

Personal Attributes

Ancient Near Eastern languages, including Akkadian and Sumerian, contain a “coded lexicon” that conveys aspects of male and female attractiveness beyond what is physically apparent (Winter 2002: 7). For example, the Akkadian term *kuzbu* and the related Sumerian word *hi-li* express beauty. They are generally translated as “allure” or “charm” and denote luxuriance, voluptuousness, and sexual attractiveness (Cassin 1968: 83–101; Jaques 2006: 251–69, 508–11; Winter 1996: 13–15; Winter 2002: 17). The Akkadian terms *damqu* and *banû* can also describe a desirable appearance and connote “good,” with respect to beneficence, quality, and origin (Garelli 1990: 176; Winter 1995: 2573; Winter 1996: 11–13, 23, n. 4). Keeping these semantics in mind, I suggest that the primary personal attributes of Neo-Assyrian ideal feminine beauty entailed sexuality (encompassing sexual allure and availability), fertility, and moral and sexual purity. These behavioral, biological, and conceptual aspects of beauty cannot be directly observed in most static images, but they might have been communicated in art through a figure’s physical appearance, dress, and/or pictorial context.

Throughout the history of Mesopotamian literature, floral motifs allude to sexuality (Besnier 2002: 67–69; Leick 1994: 173–79; Leick 2000: 80–81; Westenholz 1992: 382–83). In the Neo-Assyrian-period myth of Nabu and Tashmetu, for example, the garden is the site of the couple’s intimate encounter. The “Garden Party” relief might illustrate a similarly erotic setting (Albenda 1976: 61, 67; Collins 2004: 2–3) (Fig. 2). Here, the bed on which the king reclines implies the potential for sexual activity (Collins 2004: 3).³¹

Neo-Assyrian art does not explicitly represent a queen’s sexual behavior, but plaques bearing erotic scenes that might have indirectly honored female sexuality were discovered in the woman’s sarcophagus of Nimrud’s Tomb I (Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 99; Oates and Oates 2001: 80). Describing lust at a literary remove, compositions of the Neo-Assyrian period demonstrate the charms of a woman’s nude body. In the Gilgamesh Epic, the harlot Shamhat seduces Enkidu by exposing her body to him (GE I 189).³² In the myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, as she dresses, Ereshkigal allows Nergal to see her flesh, after which the two embrace and go to the bed (NE iv 6–10).

Inside the Neo-Assyrian palace, female sexuality was indicated primarily through images of frontally posed nude women depicted on an array of Neo-Assyrian seals and Levantine ivory sculptures (Figs. 7). Assyrian men and women would probably have personally interacted with both corpora of imagery. Seals were worn as adorn-

³¹ Alternatively, Albenda (1976: 65) has suggested that the king reclines on a bed because he is sick, or that his habit of using a daybed during a particular illness became a court custom.

³² Prostitutes are typically scorned in Mesopotamian literature, but Shamhat is presented in a positive light, because her sexual encounter with Enkidu helps to civilize him (Harris 1990: 222–23).

ment and used as signatory devices, and many of the nude ivory figures served as handles. Sometimes their imagery confronts the viewer directly, as is exemplified by an ivory figure that cups her breasts as if she is presenting them (Bahrani 1996: 8–10; Herrmann and Laidlaw 2009: pl. 94, no. 287).

In conjunction with sexuality, fertility would have enabled royal procreation. Neo-Assyrian images of men as well as queens, goddesses, and archetypal female figures were associated with floral motifs in contexts that referenced fertility. In the “Garden Party” relief, for example, the date palm is a possible emblem of female fertility (Fig. 2). Containing conifers that might have symbolized masculinity, the garden could have signified the queen’s childbearing capacity (Collins 2004: 3; Collins 2006: 102, 105). Further implying fertility, the king holds a lotus flower, an Egyptian symbol of regeneration that might have been familiar to elite Assyrians (Thomason 2004: 153; Thomason 2010: 201).

Men and women depicted in Levantine ivory sculpture were also associated with floral imagery, such as lotus flowers (Fig. 7) and a stylized (or “sacred”) tree (Herrmann and Laidlaw 2009: pls. 10–11, 72–74, figs. 47–50, 53, 320–322, 324). The stylized tree regularly appears in Neo-Assyrian art, but only rulers and male genies are shown fertilizing or purifying the tree (Ataç 2010: 159–66; Barnett 1975b: 13, 17–19; Collon 2001: 82–85, pls. XI–XIV, nos. 151–82).³³ In Assyrian contexts, imported ivory goods showing women flanking the trees would have complemented the male-themed vignettes and served as subtle reminders of women’s active roles, as fertile agents, in maintaining a flourishing empire. This concept might have been displayed through the oversized gold crown discovered in Tomb III at Nimrud. The headdress is topped with grape leaves and features dangling clusters of grapes and registers of blooming flowers, pomegranates, and winged female figures (Damerji 1999: 28–31, figs. 42–45; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 313, pics. 159–60).³⁴ Its glimmering design could have reiterated the relationship between the natural world, properties of feminine beauty, and imperial power.

Faunal imagery, too, might have been connected to women’s fertility. An Assyrian stamp seal from Nimrud’s Tomb IV supports this relationship (al-Gailani Werr 2008: 156, fig. 19-d; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 419, pic. 201, no. MM 2139A). Its face is divided in half: on one side, a horse suckles its foal; on the other side, is a nude, winged woman.³⁵ The same type of female figure is carved on the gold surface of a bovine-shaped stamp seal found in Tomb I at Nimrud (al-Gailani Werr 2008: 155, fig. 19-a; Hussein and Suleiman 2000: 215, pic. 13). This object presumably belonged

³³ For recent studies on the stylized (or “sacred”) tree, see Collins 2006; Giovino 2007; Porter 2003.

³⁴ Regarding the use of pomegranates as aphrodisiacs, see Pientka 2002: 512–13. On the iconography of grapes, see Albenda 1974; Ataç 2012: 420.

³⁵ Occasionally, Neo-Assyrian terracotta sculptures portray motherhood and women suckling babies (for example, see Klengel-Brandt 1978: 57, pl. 9, fig. 287).

to the interred queen, who, by impressing the bovine into clay, would have generated impressions of a nude goddess.

A woman's moral and sexual purity would have been essential to Neo-Assyrian ideals of feminine beauty, as it would have validated the attributes of female sexuality and fertility. In addition to physical dirtiness and biological conditions (such as menstruation and having recently given birth), moral transgressions were believed to pollute female sexuality and fertility (Leick 1994: 211–19). Personifying purity was the Assyrian queen (and later queen mother), Naqia. She was also known as “Zakutu,” the Akkadian equivalent of the Levantine name Naqia; both names mean “pure, clean, innocent” (Macgregor 2012: 97; Melville 2004: 56).³⁶ Melville (2004: 56) has suggested that Naqia's “purity and righteousness as the receptacle of the king's seed” legitimized her son Esarhaddon's (r. 680–669 BCE) claim to the throne.

Clearly a queen's sexuality and fertility would have been positive attributes when shared with the king for the sake of the regeneration of the empire, but if defiled by another man they would have been ruined. To some extent, a woman's moral purity would have motivated her faithful dedication to the king and thus protected her sexual purity. It also would have been the king's responsibility to ensure that she was not raped or corrupted by another man (Glassner 1989: 76; Melville 2004: 56).³⁷ Queens had bodyguards, and it appears that at least some women lived in palace quarters that were protected by a lock-master (Macgregor 2012: 56–58; Melville 1999: 107–10; Melville 2004: 37–38; Radner 2010: 276–78; Svärd 2012a 163–78, 187; Teppo 2007b).

The mural crown (depicting fortified city walls) portrayed on queens might symbolize the inviolability not only of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, but also of the royal city, the palace citadel, the queen's quarters, and, in turn, of the queen's personal purity (Börker-Klähn 1997; Ornan 2002: 474–77) (Figs. 1–4). In the “Garden Party” relief, stepped motifs resembling the crenellations of the queen's crown run along the borders of her robe and the tops of her shoes. This design might have emphasized the protection of her body from foreign assault or other forms of contamination. Evoking the sanctity and security of the Assyrian capital, and further implying her physical, moral, and sexual purity, the queen's name “Liballi-sharrat” literally means “the inner city is queen” (Ambos 2001: 660).

³⁶ For a discussion of Naqia/Zakutu's two names and her possibly foreign origin, see Macgregor 2012: 97–98, 106; Melville 1999: 13–16, 43.

³⁷ The greatest threat to Assyrian queens would have been seizure and sexual assault by an enemy (Melville 2004: 40, n. 17). Art and texts document that the Assyrians took women and children from enemy palaces, and a relief (BM 124927) from Assurbanipal's North Palace appears to depict an Assyrian soldier raping a woman, who might have been an Arab queen (Marcus 1995: 202).

Conclusion

This essay has endeavored to stimulate new perspectives on ideal feminine beauty and its representation in the Neo-Assyrian court. Recent textual studies confirm the power and influence of elite women in Neo-Assyrian culture (Macgregor 2012; Melville 1999, 2004; Ornan 2002; Reade 1987; Svärd 2012a, 2012b; Teppo 2007a, 2007b). Further philological research, especially on texts and terminology describing queens and goddesses, could expand our understanding of the potential relationship between women's agency and beauty.

The analysis of the art presented here shows that images of beautiful women would have celebrated a woman's potential as a vital link in the royal dynasty and acclaimed a queen's identity as the inviolable womb of the empire. In the palace, and in the empire, the juxtaposition of actual Assyrian queens with images of divine, and idealized figures, both nude and clothed, would have reinforced and augmented their elite status and perceived characteristics and attributes of outward and personal beauty. In particular, Assyrian queens might have embodied – in flesh, dress, and personal attributes – the visual and conceptual themes of abundance and imperial geography that permeated the arts and ideology of the court.

In exploring this topic, I concede that many intriguing matters lie beyond retrieval. I would like to acknowledge three issues that are of particular relevance to this investigation. First, it may not be possible to reconstruct the way in which the concept of ideal feminine beauty was consciously or subconsciously committed to and replicated in works of art. Its properties were probably not spontaneously defined by a master designer, but would have gradually emerged, coalesced, and acquired value before they were translated to visual media. Second, the social distribution of the concept of ideal feminine beauty proposed here is unknown. Its ideological nuances might have been comprehended only by an informed elite, who themselves would have selectively acquired, commissioned, and designed the art under consideration (Ataç 2010; Ataç 2012: 413, 415, 423; Collins 2004: 5). Finally, the geographic and temporal boundaries for the ideals of feminine beauty valued by the Assyrians are not defined, nor is their impact on subsequent cultures' conceptions of beauty fully accounted (Bahrani 1996). In closing, we might muse upon whether, disassociated from Neo-Assyrian identity and ideology, these notions of ideal feminine beauty could have survived the fall of the empire and the destruction of its art.

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Aubrey Baadsgaard

Uniforms and Non-Conformists: Tensions and Trends in Early Dynastic Fashion

Abstract: This paper offers a detailed analysis of dress from material and visual sources in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia (ca. 2900–2350 BCE) as the means to reconstruct fashions and fashion trends. A consideration of existing fashions and fashion trends through space and time reveals the existence of multiple and competing fashions in Early Dynastic society related to social distinctions based on gender, status, occupation, and locality. The evidence further shows that these fashions came to have conventional associations with different social personae including male and female rulers, musicians, and soldiers of various ranks. For individuals in Early Dynastic society, displaying certain fashions and adhering to existing rules of fashion was the means of embodying such social personae and of showcasing an achievement of the power to act out social roles and display social affinities. Along with providing the means for embodying multiple fashions, dress also served as an index of context, a necessary connection to social events and proceedings – marriages, funerals, cultic rites, celebratory feasts, military conquests – and was a crucial part of distinguishing and empowering participants in such events.

Keywords: dress, fashion, adornment, Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, Royal Tombs of Ur, gender, class, social complexity

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Introduction

Decisions about what or what not to wear as well as how and where to wear it are the focus of many contemporary popular media sites and programs. Stars walking the red carpet showcasing the latest fashions set the standard adopted by the popular masses seeking to find and display their social identity, to be both recognizable and acceptable according to society's norms, but also unique and socially capable. While matters of dress and fashion might seem frivolous concerns of the modern world, decisions about how to present ourselves to society seem universal in time and space; our capacity for self-modification and adornment is "a central feature of our humanity" (Reischer and Koo 2004: 297). When an individual encounters and navigates the demands of culture and society, dress and fashion are indispensable for creating and displaying similarity and difference, and ultimately for bringing into existence the

beings and relationships that underpin social experience (Calefato 2004: 3). Such was the case in the ancient Near East, where decisions about what to wear, including efforts both to lead and to follow fashion trends, were not only a central part of life (see Bahrani 1995) but a primary driver and a principal player in the emergence, development, and institutionalization of social, economic, and political class divisions and identities at critical places and during significant moments beginning with its earliest civilizations. The role of fashion as a central component of social developments is particularly evident in the Early Dynastic phase of Mesopotamia (ca. 2900–2350 BCE), a period marked by increasing socio-political complexity, competition for and accumulation of wealth through extensive trading contexts, and conflict between growing city-states with emerging ruling classes (see Pollock 1999; Postgate 1992; Cooper 1983; Yoffee 1995). This paper explores the evidence for ancient dress and fashion in this critical period of the ancient Near East, showcasing how decisions of what to wear and how to wear it were an important part and accompaniment of social, political, and economic developments and institutions that had far-reaching and lasting implications.

To examine the social workings of fashions in dress in Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, this paper utilizes material remains and visual media from archaeological sites. These sources provide insight into four facets of dress: hairstyles, clothing, body ornaments, and cosmetics. Each of these facets contributes to the complete social body, as defined by Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992: 18), which includes the total assemblage of *body modifications* such as alterations to hair, face, and skin, and *body supplements*, including the wearing of clothing and jewelry. The physical characteristics of each facet of dress are the means of connecting individual dress to socially held fashions (see Flügel 1950). Finding patterns in these characteristics is the means for determining which styles of ornaments, clothing, hairstyles, or make-up were considered fashionable in Early Dynastic society. Spatial and temporal patterns in dress across the Early Dynastic sphere are the basis for defining regional fashions and fashion trends and investigating their connections to important social developments.

Early Dynastic Mesopotamia: Social Developments and Social Classes

The evidence of dress and fashion comes from Early Dynastic cities located in southern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), in the floodplain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (refer to Fig. 1). The Early Dynastic period covers the first three-quarters of the 3rd millennium BCE (2900–2350 BCE) and is named in reference to its association with the earliest attested historic political dynasties of southern Mesopotamia (Frankfort 1934: 48). The architectural sequence of temples at the Diyala sites (Tell Asmar, Khafajah, and Tell Agrab) provided the stratigraphic basis for dividing the Early

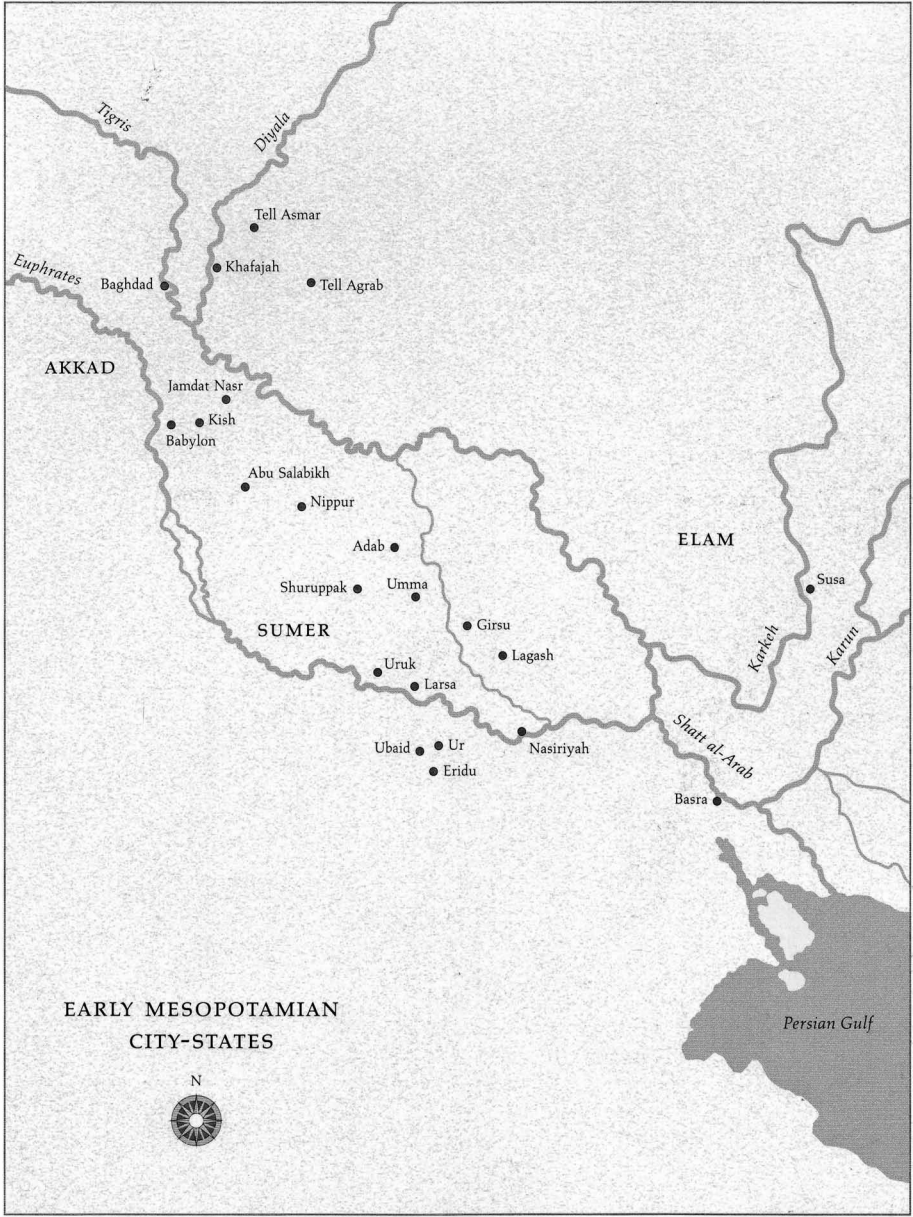


Figure 1: Map of early Mesopotamian city states. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Dynastic period into three principal phases (ED I, II, III), the latest phase divided into two sub-phases (ED IIIa and b). This sequence is applied to southern Mesopotamia, even if its cultural and artistic styles differ from those in the Diyala (Porada *et al.* 1992: 103).

This research utilizes evidence from each phase of the Early Dynastic Period and across a range of sites and geographic areas. Graves from the late Early Dynastic period at the site of Ur (Woolley 1934) provide an especially large corpus of evidence related to dress, with other evidence recovered from burials at the sites of Kish (Mackay 1925, 1929), Abu Salabikh (Martin *et al.* 1985; Postgate 1980), and Khafajah (Delougaz *et al.* 1967). Sites in the Diyala region produced the largest corpus of Early Dynastic statuary with evidence relative to dress, particularly of clothing and hair-styles (Delougaz 1952; Frankfort 1939, 1943; Braun-Hölzinger 1977). Recovered from sites in the southern floodplain such as Ur, Kish, Fara, Lagash, and Tello (ancient Girsu) are plaques, figurines, cylinder seals and impressions, and stone sculpture insightful into Early Dynastic dress and fashion (see Woolley 1934; Zettler and Horne 1998; Pittman 1998; Moorey 1978, 1979; Gibson 1972; Amiet 1980; Martin 1972, 1988; Winter 1985). The Nippur Inanna Temple (IT) VIIB period (ED IIIa) also contained statues as well as hoards of beads and pendants relevant to a study of Early Dynastic dress and fashion (D. Hansen 1965, 1975; Hansen and Dales 1962).

The Early Dynastic period witnessed a progressive trend towards the enlargement of city-states and their settlement networks (Adams 1981; Stone and Zimansky 2004: 212) as well as the rise of increasingly complex social institutions, an impetus and an outgrowth of urbanization. Based on recent re-evaluations of Early Dynastic architecture and stratigraphy, it seems that the early part of the Early Dynastic was longer and more important than previously known (see D. Hansen 1971; Evans 2005, 2007). This early period saw the foundation and refurbishment of cultic precincts, the production of both traditional and innovative material culture, and increasing social and economic integration among city-states. This integration continued into the late Early Dynastic period as evident in the expansion of regional and foreign exchange networks and inter-city alliances. Cities and their ruling bureaucracies continued to grow in size and complexity, culminating in the emergence of a formal ruling class and the social ranks and divisions necessary to legitimize and support them (Gelb 1965; Gelb *et al.* 1991; Cooper 1986). The fashions created and embodied by this ruling class and their subordinates was a primary component in the development of increasing social complexity and its attendant social, economic, and political divisions within Early Dynastic society.

Theorizing Dress and Fashion

Drawing upon Barthes' (1985 [1967]) work on the "fashion system," this research views dress and fashion as two distinct, yet necessarily connected social phenomena that

exist in an ongoing dialectal exchange in which the bodily additions and transformations of dress make possible the creation and realization of socially recognized fashions even while gaining inspiration and direction from them. To better characterize and enlighten the relationship of dress and fashion and the social outcomes of this relationship, this research draws from the theoretical perspectives of embodiment and materiality. Since dress directly involves the body, it follows that the body is the place where social standards for dress (fashion) are made visible, tangible, and socially operable (see Dittmar 1992; Entwistle 2000). Dress, thus, exists as fashion's embodiment, its social enactment by means of the body. Since it exists as tangible and physical bodily displays, dress is also a kind of material culture (see D. Miller 2005). It consists of manipulations and additions to the body with properties that must be experienced by means of the senses. Following this logic, dress can be considered the materialization of fashion by means of body manipulations and transformations. Dress is never a simple or uniform reflection of fashion, however, but the playing out of multiple and competing fashions and interpretations of fashions on the individual body.

Fashion is a social phenomenon larger than dress, both socially and temporally. It can be considered a kind of ideology, a socially held set of beliefs that serve to define and interpret bodily practice. Fashion demands "mutual imitation" from individuals in a given society and thus restrains individual choice and expression (Simmel 1957: 323). Fashion is often the means of defining social stereotypes linked to economic class, gender, age, or other social divisions (see Calefato 2004; K. Hansen 2004; Fraser 1981). While existing outside of the individual and limiting individual choices in dress, fashion can itself be considered a process, a social phenomenon in constant flux, subject to the available materials and symbols that comprise dress and to individual decisions and interpretations of social expectations of how to dress. Davis (1992: 5) characterizes fashion as "an incipient or quasi-code," since it is always undergoing reformulation as social actors draw from available visual and tactile symbols, combining and recombining them in ever changing patterns (see also Sapir 1931: 139; Barnard 1996). The outcome of fashion is thus rarely certain, but rather often unpredictable, and subject to frequent alteration, especially during times of social upheaval or change (see Fraser 1981). Fashions are inseparably linked to specific cultural contexts, whether formal or casual in nature. This context, including the timing and location of social interactions and proceedings, provides the backdrop for social performance, involving social actors making appropriate decisions about what to wear.

With reference to current theorizing on the social phenomena of fashion and dress, it is clear that both, when studied in tandem, can provide significant insight into society, specifically into the creation and maintenance of social divisions, ranks, and classes, as well as into various types of interaction between society's different groups and members. What individuals wear is essentially their "social skin," providing for their connection to larger society and enabling their interactions with others

(T. Turner 1993; B. Turner 1996). Dressing is an experiential and creative process through which social actors create and acknowledge social identities, and anticipate, form, and abandon social relationships (D. Miller 2005: 14). Since dress and fashion emerge at the intersection of the individual and the social, research into both in combination provides social insights at two levels of resolution. Investigating dress and fashion is critical to better understanding social and political developments in Early Dynastic society as a whole, but also for apprehending the lives and roles of the individuals who were part of these developments: the men and women, kings and queens, soldiers, and servants whose decisions about what to wear, within the expectations of fashions, but sometimes also contesting them, were part of the creative and dynamic process that gave rise to a social and political system in the ancient Near East with lasting and far-reaching implications.

Early Dynastic Fashion

The evidence from Early Dynastic sites reveals the existence of discernible fashions in dress across the Early Dynastic sphere (see Baadsgaard 2008: 292–312). Everyone in society, males and females, young and old, rulers and commoners all engaged with fashion through their decisions of what to wear, how to style their hair, and apply their make-up. In choosing what to wear and how to present themselves to society, individuals in the Early Dynastic period embodied contemporary fashions, and in so doing, presented themselves as socially recognizable and capable, able to successfully participate in and navigate social responsibilities and relationships. No singular set of standards of dress, however, existed at all times and places. Rather, when considering the evidence of dress from across greater Mesopotamia, it is apparent that multiple and competing fashions existed in Early Dynastic society, many with unique elements linked to location, others with connections to identity. Dress was also an index of context, a necessary connection to social events and proceedings – marriages, funerals, cultic rites, celebratory feasts, military conquests – and part of distinguishing and enabling participants in such events.

Gendered Fashions

Fashions in all aspects of Early Dynastic dress were part of creating and displaying gendered distinctions, primarily between males and females, but also perhaps distinguishing other gender categories as known from written texts (see Gabbay 2008 for further elaboration). Beginning with the head and hair, males had changeable sets of hair and beards, with the head and face left shaven in some contexts, primarily cultic and festive occasions, and wigs of long hair and artificial beards worn over shaved heads and faces in others including administrative or official events, with helmets the

typical headwear of military engagements. Men wearing beards did not wear mustaches, but kept the upper lip clean-shaven. Sculptures from the Diyala region provide numerous examples of males wearing long hair with matching long beards (see Frankfort 1939, 1943). Long hair is parted down the middle and worn in long locks brought around the sides of the face, with the beard ending at the same length as the hair. Clean-shaven hairstyles appear more fashionable by the late Early Dynastic period in the Diyala, although long hair and beard styles persist (see Frankfort 1939: pls. 60–61, 105–107). At sites in the southern floodplain, both long hair and clean-shaven hairstyles are common, with notable examples from the North Temple at Nippur dating to late ED period (examples from the North Temple at Nippur, McCown *et al.* 1978: pl. 67, and Inanna Temple VIIB, dating to the ED IIIa). North on the Euphrates, male statues from Mari have shaved heads with long beards with elaborate wavy locks (see Parrot 1967: pl. 37).¹ According to visual and textual sources, males wore wigs and false beards for certain occasions, particularly divine and royal individuals or mythical figures associated with them.² In the southern floodplain (at Ur, Kish and Khafajah), males also sometimes wore headbands around the forehead called brims, made of a few large beads between two lengths of chain, or strips of metal (Woolley 1934).³

For Early Dynastic females, one general hairstyle was prevalent – the plaiting (braiding) and drawing up of hair around the head. Numerous variations to this style existed, such as the wearing of loose curls of hair at the back of the neck or on either side of the face. The hair could also be covered with textiles or a hat, or bound with pins, cloth, or ribbons. The best examples of female hairstyles come from heads recovered from late Early Dynastic levels at sites in the Diyala (at Khafajah Sin IX and Temple Oval I). The hair on these figures is parted in the middle, plaited in several small braids, and braided into one large ponytail wrapped around the head. Sometimes a pin keeps the braid in place (Frankfort 1939: pls. 79b–c, 83). The hair at the end of the large braid could be left straight, or the large braid brought up over a comb at the back of the head (Frankfort 1939: pls. 74, 87c, d, f, and various from 90). Locks of hair could be left loose on the side of the head or braided into separate braids tucked behind the ear. Sometimes a turban or banded cloth is wound around the

1 Parallels for the Mari beards are found on bearded bulls, such as those attached to the sounding boxes of lyres from the Ur Royal Cemetery (Evans 2005: 359).

2 The lapis beard worn by the divine and royal figures was attached or affixed to the face, a clear reference to a false beard (see Polonsky 2002: 211). The wearing of false hair has parallels in ancient Egypt (Fletcher 2005: 3; 1994). Beards worn by males at Mari resemble human-headed bulls in southern Mesopotamia, perhaps suggesting they are false (Evans 2005: 359), while stone wigs from the Ur III and Old Babylonian periods from Telloh, Ur, and Uruk show that hair was a removable entity (see Braun-Hölzinger 1991: 373, Tafel 24).

3 Woolley thought brims functioned similar to the Arab *'aqal*, to secure the hair or a head cloth around the head.



Figure 2: Cylinder seal impression from the Royal Tombs of Ur (grave PG 800), showing seated females and female attendants or servers with drawn up hairstyles and wearing typical female robes. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

forehead and low over the middle of the back of the head (Frankfort 1939: pls. 72–73, 87g–h). Female heads from the Ishtar Temple at Mari also have elaborate drawn up hairstyles with parallels to Diyala hairstyles (Parrot 1956: pl. 38), and cylinder seals with banquet scenes from Ur also depict seated women with drawn-up hair (Woolley 1934: pl. 193, nos. 16, 18) (see Fig. 2). Late Early Dynastic female figures from Inanna Temple VIIIB at Nippur have the greatest variation in hairstyles. Some wear their hair down, and another has hair braided against the head, with the ends left loose (Evans 2005: pl. 145).

On the lower body, clothes were augmented by various body ornaments. Men wore knee or calf-length skirts or kilts with the upper body left bare. Statuary from the Diyala sites of Tell Asmar and Khafajah show several different styles of male skirts. On statues from the Asmar hoard,⁴ the skirt is cone-shaped and set against a square torso (Frankfort 1939: pl. 12). Kilts have a slit behind the left hip closed by two to five loops and secured around the waist by a tasseled belt (Frankfort 1939: 52). The fringe on the end of male skirts is rendered in a variety of different ways: in straight lines, with pointed tufts or tassels, or in pointed leaf-shaped tabs. The extent of fringe varies between kilts, sometimes covering the bottom quarter of the skirt and sometimes most all of it. In ED III sculpture from Khafajah (Sin IX, Small Shrine), kilts are mostly unshaven and depicted in elaborate tufts (Frankfort 1939: pl. 53, no. 39, pl. 66,

⁴ These are conventionally dated to the ED II, but based on current revisions to the Diyala chronology by Evans (2005, 2007), they probably date to the ED I.

no. 78). Male statues and inlays from Mari also depict a wide range of male clothing styles; dedicatory statues wear a calf-length skirt with five to six rows of tufts, the top row or narrow band serving as a belt with a tasseled end worn behind the left hip (Parrot 1956, 1967). Rarely, a second piece of scalloped material is worn over the top of the skirt at the waist. Individual tufts are depicted as leaf-shaped tabs, and rows lengthen slightly from top to bottom. Metal pins might also be worn by men, perhaps on the waist, and scant evidence from the remnants of paint on statuary suggest that males' tasseled belts were colored black (Parrot 1956: 85).

Fashionable female garments almost always started with a long robe worn across the chest and under the right arm, then wrapped around the back and secured over the top of the left shoulder. Robe styles varied from plain single pieces of cloth, to doubled cloths with hems. Women wore ankle length robes under the right arm and secured over the left shoulder, sometimes with the full right arm, shoulder, and breast left exposed (examples from Nippur IT VIIB, Sin VIII–IX at Khafajah, and the Ishtar Temple at Mari, see Evans 2005: 309; D. Hansen 1975: 165, no. 21c, Frankfort 1939: pl. 77, no. 108, pl. 78, no. 109; Parrot 1967: 104). Women might also wear robes over both shoulders with seams running from the wrist to the hem (Parrot 1956: pl. 26). Robes were usually single pieces of cloth, but could also be doubled or even tripled (see Andrae 1922: Taf. 30). Both males and females are depicted wearing clothing over the left shoulder, suggesting fashions for either gender dictated the covering of this shoulder. Female garments may have been dyed one or multiple colors such as black or red. Black coloring on the seam and red paint on tufted garments is evident on female statues from Mari wearing elaborate garments with the distinctive *polos* hat (Parrot 1956: 85); Woolley (1934: 239) reports glimpsing pieces of red textiles near female bodies in death pits in the Ur Royal Cemetery, and an Eblaite princess is said to have been given cloaks in white and reddish brown (Archi 2003: 167). The frequent occurrence of garment pins in graves indicates that pins were essential for binding female garments. Based on visual depictions and their location relative to skeletal remains in graves, pins, which could be either curved and straight in form, seem to have been inserted horizontally over women's robes at the left shoulder, or worn in pairs (crossing each other) over cloaks. Cylinder seals with or without beads could be suspended from pins (Parrot 1962: pl. 11–13). Toggle pins were always given along with clothing to women at Ebla at marriage and death, suggesting certain garment styles and pins were worn together (see Archi 2003: 188).

Body ornaments of some variety were worn by both genders. Fashionable for females was the wearing of beaded necklaces and metal earrings, often complemented by armbands, bracelets, and strings of beads, amulets, and cylinder seals suspended from garment pins. Fashionable accessories for males included belts and weaponry, sometimes worn with beaded necklaces or earrings. In graves at Ur, women are typically buried with beads apparently worn around the neck as necklaces, and more rarely on the arms, wrists, or around the waist as a belt. Visual

depictions also show the wearing of certain shapes of beads and ornaments, including: triangular beads at Assur (Andrae 1922: pl. 28c), round and oval beads at Kish (Langdon 1924: pls. 6 and 38; Mackay 1925: pl. 35), and disc shaped pendants at Mari (Parrot 1967: pl 78). Inlays from Mari also show women wearing square and diamond shaped beads suspended from garment pins with cylinder seals (Parrot 1962: pls. 11–13). In textual sources, women at Ebla wore necklaces made of several dozen spherical and double-conoid gold beads (Archi 2003: 182). Earrings depicted in visual sources are always worn pierced through the ears, usually represented by drill holes in the ear, as in inlays from the ED III Palace A at Kish (Mackay 1925: pl. 35), figurines at Ebla (Parrot 1967: 282, pl. LXXVII, no. 2766, 2566) and female heads from the Shara Temple (Frankfort 1943: no. 287), or as hoops suspended from a knob pierced in the ear, such as depicted in inlays from Mari (Parrot 1967: pl. 62).

Accentuating facial features through applying cosmetic substances and using cosmetic implements for the shaping of eyebrows and other features was a widespread practice for both genders. The lining of the eyes of both genders with black paint, probably to accentuate the eyes and face, is apparent on statues and in fragments of inlays from statues and composite cult figures, such found in the Tell Asmar hoard (Frankfort 1939: pls. 3–4). In the visual imagery across the Early Dynastic sphere, male eyebrows were often shaped and trimmed to further emphasize the eyes and to match well-groomed hair and beards. Based on the contents of cockle shells from graves at the sites of Ur, Kish and Khafajah, kohl was used to outline the eyes or enhance the eyelashes, and other colors, primarily green, but also red, yellow, and white were applied on the eyes, or perhaps on other parts of the face and body (Woolley 1934: 245; Bimson 1980; Moorey 1978: microfiche 1 D07-F14; Mackay 1929: 130–136; Delougaz *et al.* 1967: 134–42). So-called cosmetic kits consisting of cone-shaped containers holding from two to four implements including tweezers, picks, stilettos, and rounded sticks and commonly found in late Early Dynastic graves at Ur, Kish, and Abu Salabikh, and most often associated with males likely aided in the application of cosmetics and the trimming of eyebrows and facial hair (Zettler and Horne 1998: 173; Martin *et al.* 1985: 109; Postgate 1980: 94).

Local Fashions

Local fashions in dress are evident in the distinct attributes of dress found in different urban centers in the Early Dynastic sphere. In most areas, local fashions seem to combine traditional dress with influences from regional fashions. Distinctions in body ornaments by locality are most apparent, although discernible differences in hairstyles and clothing also exist. Basic hair and beard styles seem fairly consistent across the Early Dynastic sphere with some regional variation in the rendering of hair and beards at Mari (wavy locks with curled ends) and the Diyala sites (long spiral-form locks) (see examples as provided above). Female hairstyles

also show regional distinctions. A plaited and drawn-up hairstyle was standard in the Diyala region, while braided and loose hairstyles were more common at Nippur. Hair ornaments more clearly showcase distinct local fashions, most pronounced in the elaborate female headdresses and male brims at Ur, visual depictions of the peaked caps worn by males at Kish (Mackay 1925: 48), and the large *polos* hats worn by women at Mari (Parrot 1967: pls. 51, 58–60; 1956: pl. 37). Local fashions of clothing are evident in the distinctive fringe of male kilts in the Diyala sites, the variability in the wearing of the female robe at Nippur, and the long, tufted robes worn with cloaks and shawls by females at Mari (Frankfort 1939: pl. 53, no. 39, pl. 66, no. 78; see Evans 2005: 309; see D. Hansen 1975: 165, no. 21c, Frankfort 1939: pl. 77, no. 108, pl. 78, no. 109; Parrot 1967: 104).

Some body ornaments types are unique to certain Early Dynastic cities, suggesting they were part of local fashions. Silver roundels or discs, probably worn as ornaments and/or clothing fasteners were common in the Kish A Cemetery and found in late Early Dynastic (ED IIIb) graves at Abu Salabikh and Khafajah, but absent in the Ur Cemetery (Mackay 1929: 177; Martin *et al.* 1985: 56; Postgate 1980: 94; Delougaz *et al.* 1967: 117). Beaded cuffs, chokers, and necklaces made of specific color and shape combinations of beads and adhering to uniform standards in size are unique to Ur Royal Cemetery and seem part of distinct local fashion. Styles and colors used in beaded jewelry are also hallmarks of local fashions. In the late Early Dynastic cemetery at Ur, lapis lazuli is the principal material of beaded ornaments, with carnelian and gold common in high-status, royal fashions (see Woolley 1934; Zettler and Horne 1998). Shell and carnelian were fashionable at the Y burials at Kish (Langdon 1924: 104; Watelin 1934: 28), and frit in the A Cemetery (Mackay 1929: 182; Moorey 1994: 173). A mixture of materials such as frit, bone, carnelian, and lapis lazuli characterize body ornaments at Abu Salabikh (Postgate 1980; Martin *et al.* 1985: 4; Steele 1990: 185; Thomas nd). Beads of steatite and frit and the absence of metal beads (silver and gold) comprise the bulk of beaded ornaments worn in the Diyala region (Khafajah) (Delougaz *et al.* 1967).

Occupational Fashions

The wearing of certain fashions seems linked to the embodiment and performance of different social roles and occupations in Early Dynastic society. These fashions most often occur as sets, involving particular styles and materials of hair and body ornaments, clothing, and hairstyles. At least two distinct fashions are apparent in the evidence, linked to the occupations of soldiers/guards and singers/musicians, while other known occupations such as cupbearer, standard-bearer, and inspector were apparently also in existence, although evidence for their distinctive dress is sparse and limited to only a few examples. Gods and goddesses, who constituted a special class of beings, also wore distinctive fashions.



Figure 3: Detail of the “war side” of the Royal Standard of Ur, showing dress of military personnel, including foot soldiers and chariot drivers. © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 4: Fragment of the battle scene from the Stele of the Vultures showing Eannatum of Lagash wearing a military cloak and sash and helmet depicting the high status or royal male hairstyle. Photo by Erich Lessing. © Art Resource, NY.

The typical dress of soldiers consisted of cloaks and/or sashes with different attributes indicative of rank or position (see Fig. 3). Foot soldiers wore full body cloaks secured in the middle and sometimes decorated with circles/holes, which may also represent the type of material used (Woolley 1934: pl. 92). Two styles of sashes were worn by males of higher rank: one with tufted fringe worn by chariot drivers and probable military commanders at Ur, and one decorated with circles/holes similar to capes and worn by “diplomats” at Mari and other military personnel (Parrot 1956: pl. 56). A cloak and sash made of finely woven wool and worn by military leaders and male rulers such as Eannatum of Lagash, seems signifying of royal and military status or ranking (see Frankfort 1954: 72–73; Collon 1995: 507) (Fig. 4). Soldiers/guards and other military personnel also wore daggers and whetstones at the waist, or wielded axes in the right hand and spears in the left (Woolley 1934: pls. 91–92; Parrot 1956: 138–39, pl. LVI; 135, pl. LV).⁵

Fashions for male singers and female musicians/attendants involved the wearing of distinct “outfits” comprised of sets of hair and body ornaments, clothes, and possibly cosmetics. Male singers wore long, unkempt hair, and perhaps distinctive clothes. A statue of the musician Ur-Nanshe from Mari shows him wearing a distinctive knee length garment, and he has long hair and no beard, seemingly typical of his profession (Parrot 1967: pl. 45).⁶ In texts, the *ag bal* or “sage” is known by his loose outer hair.⁷ Variations in male skirts seem indicative of occupation and/or rank of servants (Evans 2005: 372–75). For example, a cupbearer from Mari (Parrot 1967: pl. 20), servants on the Urnanshe plaques (Frankfort 1954: 70, no. 3) and an attendant from an inlaid sounding board at Ur (D. Hansen 1998: 58) wear a plain skirt with a row of tufts on the end. An inspector and a possible staff-bearer wear a skirt made of long tufts running down from the waist in four sections (Frankfort 1954 pls. 54–55).

Female attendants found near musical instruments in royal death pits at Ur wore distinctive “outfits” comprised of standardized headdress and body ornaments (see for example, Grave PG 1237, Woolley 1934: 113). Based on depictions on cylinder seals, they wore drawn-up hairstyles and typical female full-length robes covering the shoulders (see Fig. 5). Worn on the bodies in graves were elaborate headdresses consisting of gold ribbon, gold leaf pendant wreaths, and silver combs, and body ornaments of large, double-lunate gold earrings, gold and lapis chokers, and silver garment pins with lapis heads. Green cosmetics were worn, probably on the eyes. Alterations in the attributes of size and color, such as revealed in three different size classes of gold lunate-shaped earrings, and the wearing of silver or gold ribbons,

5 In Ur III royal hymns, males wear a sword belt and hold spears, and others carry swords and double-edged axes during processions before Inanna, from *Iddin-Dagan's Sacred Marriage Hymn*, lines 55 and 57 (see Reisman 1973: 187).

6 A harp player on the Ur Standard also wears a similar hairstyle.

7 The phrase *siki bar-ra du 8* literally means “to let loose the outer hair” (see Nisaba A 44). A sage is said to be allowed to let his hair hang loose.



Figure 5: Cylinder seal impression from the Royal Tombs of Ur (grave PG 1237), showing a seated female on the upper register and female musicians on the lower register wearing drawn-up hairstyles and robes. Courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

beads, and metal spiral earrings, distinguished different ranks among female attendants/musicians (Baadsgaard 2008: 226–28). A distinctive hairstyle and wearing of head ornaments is also depicted on a shell inlay of a female musician's head from Kish showing drawn-up hair and an elaborate headdress (see Langdon 1924: pls. 6 and 38).

Fashions embodied by gods and goddesses were distinctive, but also had clear links to those worn by royal figures and cultic practitioners (priests/priestesses). Gods shared the long locks and beards of standard male dress, but often wore distinct styles, such as the blue lapis beard, hallmark of the sun god, or the drawn-up royal male hairstyle (such as by Ningirsu on Eannatum's victory stele; Frankfort 1954: 72–73). Goddesses wore distinctive horned headdress over long locks of hair, and sometimes shared the long, loose hairstyle, and a distinctive rolled-brim headdress worn by priestesses (see example in Aruz 2003: 77, no. 36).⁸ It seems that long and loose locks were reserved only for female goddesses and priestess, and for male

⁸ The rolled brim headdress seems to be worn only by *entu*-priestesses and goddesses such as the priestess Enheduanna (depicted on a Akkadian period stone disc), and on the head of the goddess Ningal from Ur III levels at Ur (Frankfort 1954: 102, no. 108).

sages and singers. In the conical laments, young women are prohibited from wearing such a style.⁹

Early Dynastic Fashion Trends

Discerning fashion trends from the early to late Early Dynastic period is difficult in light of discrepancies between the amount and type of evidence available from each phase. The late Early Dynastic period (especially the ED IIIa) is better represented in the material evidence, the visual corpus from the early phase (ED I) is abundant in the Diyala, but less well-represented at sites in the southern floodplain. In spite of these incongruities, several tangible trends are apparent in the evidence: a trend towards greater elaboration of dress, increasing standardization of certain ornament sets, and movement towards greater regional differences in fashion from the early to the late Early Dynastic period. These fashion trends both showcase Early Dynastic social, economic, and political developments and also shed light on the process of their emergence and transformation.

Elaboration

All aspects of Early Dynastic dress seem to show a clear trend toward greater elaboration through time, including using more expensive materials in head and body ornaments, including precious metals (silver and gold) and stones (lapis lazuli, carnelian, and other stones), often used together in ways that emphasize their bold and contrastive materials/colors. An additional component of elaboration was the inclusion of a greater variety and complexity of forms and shapes in all aspects of dress, and greater discrepancies in the size of the ornaments and head-dresses worn by high status individuals and those worn by lower social classes. By the late Early Dynastic period the variety of ornaments also seems to increase dramatically to the point that multiple ornament types and styles might be worn on all parts of the body from head to toe.

In terms of clothing, a trend towards greater elaboration is apparent from the early to the late Early Dynastic period as male skirts and female robes often plain (shaven) in the early period become more often fully tufted (fleece unshaven) and sometimes accompanied by decorative belts, cloaks, and hems by the late period.

⁹ Ershemma 168:34 tells of “the young woman, even though she was not a sage, let loose her outer hair (in mourning).”



Figure 6: Reconstruction of Puabi's headdress and body ornaments from grave PG 800 in the Royal Tombs of Ur. Photo courtesy of Richard Zettler, Associate Curator-in-Charge, Near East Section, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Plain and elaborate clothing fashions co-exist throughout the Early Dynastic period, however, and the wearing of two distinct clothing fashions is an important distinguisher of ranks in banqueting and celebratory scenes, such as males from females, mortals from divinity, servants from prominent individuals, and military victors from defeated captives. In dedicatory statues in Inanna Temple VIIB at Nippur, for example, women wear tufted robes and men plain skirts (Evans 2005: 304).

Hair and body ornaments become more abundant, diversified, and elaborated from the early to the late Early Dynastic period. The elaborate male brims and female headdresses that were part of royal fashions in late Early Dynastic graves at Ur have no real antecedents, and the peaked male hats from Kish and female *polos* headdresses at Mari seem a late Early Dynastic fashion. Body ornaments found in late Early Dynastic graves, especially in the Ur cemetery, far exceed any from earlier periods in quantity and

diversity. Puabi's set of 133 ornaments, including 5860 beads, showcases this variety particularly well (see Fig. 6). Patterned wearing of certain colors on chokers, cuffs, and wreaths worn by Puabi and other royal women at Ur and with gold and carnelian ornaments worn as part of male and female royal fashions show a more deliberate use of color and emphasis on contrasts in color than existed previously (see below).

Several ornament types appear to be primarily or exclusively a late Early Dynastic phenomena and demonstrate a trend towards greater diversification and complexity in dress. Earrings appear with great frequency only in the late Early Dynastic period, when they occur in multiple styles including metal spirals and in the small and large lunate-shaped earrings worn in the Ur royal graves. At Khafajah, earrings are found only in late Early Dynastic graves. Metal roundels appear only at the end of the Early Dynastic period (ED IIIb) at Kish and other sites. A shift in bead material/color used in body ornaments occurs from the early to the late Early Dynastic period, with a trend towards a greater use of frit and lapis lazuli by the late Early Dynastic period and less frequent and more deliberate use of carnelian and shell. Gold is used more abundantly in hair and body ornaments by the late period. Cosmetic kits appear only in the late Early Dynastic period, perhaps representing a greater emphasis on cosmetic manipulations than existed previously. This trend towards greater elaboration in all facets of dress seems connected to a growing concern with social distinction and a heightened use of dress as a means of creating and showcasing new social classes and divisions or to further emphasize, perhaps on a dramatic scale, previously existing social categories connected to status, role, and occupation (see further elaboration below).

Standardization

A trend towards a greater standardization in dress is apparent from the early to the late Early Dynastic period. This standardization is apparent in two dimensions: 1) in individual ornament types and 2) in combinations of hair and body ornaments worn as sets or "outfits." Standardization in individual ornaments is most apparent in the late Early Dynastic graves in the Ur Royal Cemetery. Standardization in size, for example, is evident on multiple head and body ornaments. Large double lunate-shaped earrings fall into four weight categories (~20 g, 30 g, 40 g, and 80 g); spiral earrings are a standard 2½ and 3 spirals high and 3 cm in diameter, and finger rings a standard diameter of 2 cm (see Baadsgaard 2008: 226–28). Dog collars are a standard length of 21 cm. Among the head ornaments, poplar leaf wreaths are 34 cm in length and 49 g in weight, oval-shaped, gold frontlets 8 g in weight, and gold flowers 5 to 6 cm in diameter, falling into two weight classes of 5 g and 8 g. Ribbons have two standard lengths of 4.3 m and 2.25 m and a standard width from 0.75 cm and 1.0 cm wide. Individual components of ornaments, such as beads are also standardized in size. Long carnelian beads have fairly standardized widths, and double-conoid lapis beads, standardized lengths.

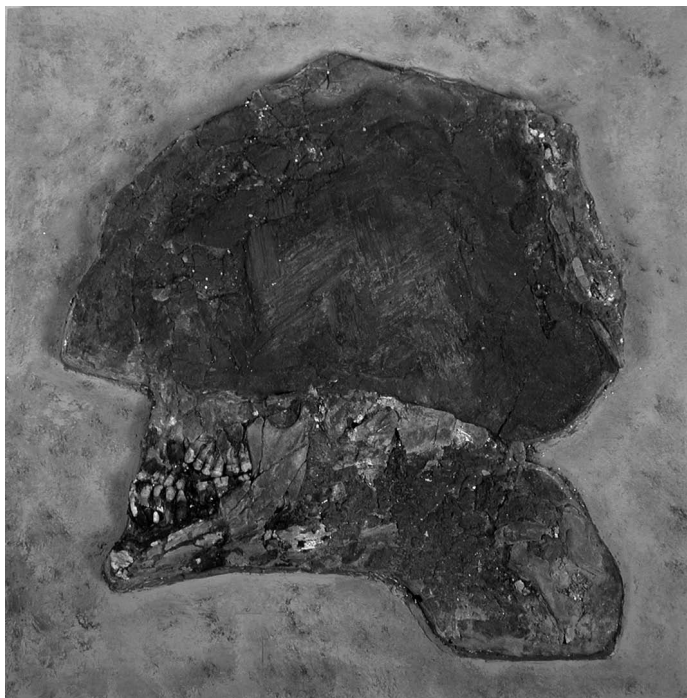


Figure 7: Photo of a male attendant at Ur (grave PG 789) wearing a helmet, a component of the typical “uniform” of soldiers or guards. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Standardization in other attributes of ornaments such as shape and color are also apparent. A more consistent and standard use of certain materials/colors is evident in the lapis/gold chokers, lapis/gold/carnelian cuffs, and gold leaf pendant wreaths with lapis and carnelian beads worn at Ur. Double conoid shaped lapis beads become the standard shape/color of beaded necklaces in royal graves. Across the Early Dynastic sphere, head ornaments are rendered in metal, particularly in gold and silver.

Standardized sets of ornaments, “outfits,” or uniforms are also apparent in the late Early Dynastic graves at Ur. The two most clearly defined types include those worn by guards/soldiers and by female attendants in royal death pits (see above). Standardized outfits for guards/soldiers included blade/whetstone or helmet/spear weapon sets worn with headbands (fillets or brims), capes, and sashes, and sometimes rounded out with shields (see Fig. 7). Standardized outfits for female attendants/musicians included a standard headdress of gold ribbon and wreaths worn together with large gold earrings, choker necklaces, silver and lapis pins, and green cosmetics (see Fig. 8). Variation between the standard outfits worn by female attendants, such as the addition of silver inlaid combs, finger rings, or other ornaments,



Figure 8: Photo of a female attendant at Ur (grave PG 1237) wearing typical headdress of her “uniform,” including a gold ribbon, gold leaf pendant wreaths, gold flowers, a silver comb, large gold lunate earrings, and a gold and lapis lazuli choker and necklace. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

appears to correspond with different social or occupational ranks. Royal women wore an elaborated version of the standard female outfit by adding multiple tiers of head-dresses and increasing the size and variety of body ornaments. This trend towards standardization in dress possibly has both social and economic implications. Standardized sizes and shapes of ornaments imply that certain types of dress were manufactured according to strict, measurable protocols by emerging craft specialists attached to specific social and political institutions. The wearing of standardized sets of ornaments seems connected to emerging social classes and occupations, whose social roles were revealed and enabled with reference to clearly defined fashions.

Regionalization

Regionalization in Early Dynastic fashions appears by the late Early Dynastic period, as many locally distinct fashions gave way to regional fashion trends. Such regional fashions are evident in the wearing of similar ornament types, colors, and shapes at Early Dynastic cities spanning the southern floodplain, such as the wearing of shell

rings around the waist as belts/girdles, round, long, and square beads as necklaces, small lunate-shaped or metal spiral earrings, and daggers suspended from belts at the waist. Similarities in female hairstyles and male military fashions such as between the cities of the Diyala, Mari, and cities in the southern floodplain are apparent by the late Early Dynastic period, and certain pin shapes such as straight pins with ball heads and pins with animal-shaped heads become popular across the Early Dynastic sphere. The use of cosmetic substances and implements for body manipulations and additions becomes part of regional fashion trends by the late Early Dynastic period, when cosmetic shells and kits both become widespread. Fashion trends also show the development of larger regional trends at the same time that other fashions remained locally distinctive. This tension between local and regional trends seems symptomatic of the opposing poles of individual and group identification that form the basis of fashion. These dueling forces of assimilation and differentiation were part of maintaining local dynasties and cultic institutions in the face of increasing social, economic, and political integration among Early Dynastic cities, the result of trading networks and inter-city conflicts and alliances.

High Status Fashions and Fashion Icons

The existence of a high status fashion is apparent in all facets of dress in the Early Dynastic period. This high status fashion had clear gendered distinctions, similar to the fashions worn by a broader section of society, but was a clear, even an enormous elaboration of them. The size and complexity of dress, such as of headdress and body ornaments were increased, and not unexpectedly, they employed many more expensive traded materials – gold, silver, lapis lazuli, carnelian, and others. These high status fashions seem connected to social and political elites and, primarily, to two contexts: cultic and/or funerary events and military endeavors (battles, victories, and celebratory feasts). These high-status fashions were worn by males and females in both royal and non-royal graves at Ur and are depicted in numerous visual sources across the Early Dynastic sphere.

High status hair and hairstyles were a rapid departure from standard male and female fashions in several respects. Male rulers had a distinct and unique hairstyle (depicted on helmets), not shared by other males, involving an elaborate plaiting of the hair and the wearing of gold ornaments, such as represented in the gold helmet worn by a male in grave PG 755 (grave of Meskalamdug) at Ur (Woolley 1934: pl. 38) and by Eannatum of Lagash (see Frankfort 1954: 72–73; Collon 1995: 507) (see Figs. 4 and 9). High-status females might wear unique hats, such as depicted in the Temples of Ishtar at Mari where women wear a distinctive polos headdress, a tall, bulbous hat worn high on the forehead that is slightly wider at the top with a band or brim at the base (Parrot 1967: pls. 51, 58–60; 1956: pl. 37). Since the polos headdress is associated with cultic contexts, it is thought to represent a specialized

form of headgear reserved for goddesses or priestesses. Other high status women, such elite females in the Ur Royal cemetery wore elaborate multi-tiered headdresses, the female buried in Puabi's Tomb (PG 800), providing the best example (see Fig. 6). Like royal, male headgear, Puabi's head ornaments are made in gold, but unlike them, they are rendered in uniquely feminine forms such as flowers and leaves, like the headdresses worn by other goddesses and high-status females. Other high status attendants buried in the Ur Royal Cemetery also wore royal fashions. Females wore predominately gold ornaments on the head including ribbons, wreaths with gold pendants, flowers, and large lunate-shaped earrings, and males wore brims/headbands made of chains of gold, with large gold beads centered on the forehead. Both men and women wore gold fillets or frontlets. Female headdresses at Ur utilized shapes not known in other fashions, including pendants made in floral forms that provided a marked contrast to the mostly geometric shapes of body ornaments worn commonly by females of lesser status (for identification of plants see N. Miller 2000). Male headdresses incorporated beads exceptional in size, usually at least twice the length and weight of beads worn in necklaces or other ornaments.

Royal fashions of clothing were an elaboration of standard male and female garments through leaving more unshaven fleece, adding decorative elements, and/or wearing more layers of clothing added to the typical skirt or robe. High status women wore robes with tufted layers, sometimes covering both arms. Robes could be worn with multiple layers of tufted and decorated cloaks and shawls. For example, seated females from Mari with the distinctive polos headdress wear tufted garments running from the neck to the ankles and covering both arms (Parrot 1967: pls. 48–50). A statue from Ebla also wears elaborate garments with a cloak and shawl (see Matthiae et al. 1995: 336, no. 95). A female from Assur wears a clothing style similar to that depicted on some women at Mari. Her garment is comprised on three layers and is worn with an elaborate headdress (Andrae 1922: Taf. 30). The shawl is decorated with diagonal lines in front and relief-carved zigzags in back.¹⁰ Cloak pins worn with the clothing of high status individuals were longer and heavier than standard pins, and were made in gold, rather than the usual silver or copper, and often worn in pairs or sets of three with strings of beads, amulets, and/or cylinder seals. Fashions in clothes worn by male rulers combined an elaborate tufted skirt with a cloak of finely woven wool, with connections to military endeavors (see Frankfort 1954: 72–73; Collon 1995: 507).

The body ornaments worn by high status individuals were usually bigger, more abundant and distinct, and made of gold and carnelian as compared to the silver/copper and lapis lazuli worn by a wider segment of society. High status males in the Ur Royal Cemetery wore weapons, which were gold and/or silver rather than the standard

10 This type of garment was probably considered a luxury item; a similar garment was listed as a lavish funerary gift given to a temple administrator and his wife at the Early Dynastic city of Adab (Foxvog 1979: 70).



Figure 9: Gold helmet found in the tomb of Meskalamdug (PG 755) at Ur.
© Trustees of the British Museum.

copper, such as the set of gold weaponry found with a high status male in grave PG 755. Also in the Ur Royal Cemetery, the high status woman from Puabi's Grave (PG 800) wore an outfit that was a huge elaboration even of the typical set of ornaments worn by other high status females in the cemetery. Puabi (PG 800) wore eleven ornament types instead of the two to four worn by other high status females, including several unique ornament types such as a garter, collar, strings of beads and amulets, elaborate beaded belt with gold ring pendants, and a "cape" of 3569 beads (see Fig. 10). Her cape alone has more than ten times the number of total beads worn by any other female in the cemetery. Her ornaments are also larger in size: her gold, double-lunate earrings are twice as heavy as any other pair and her choker necklace is three times as long and double the weight of any other, and her gold finger rings, garment pins, and gold metal spiral earrings worn in greater quantities. Puabi's ornaments were also distinct in appearance compared to others. Her metal ornaments and beads are almost exclusively in gold, as opposed to the more typical silver and copper, and her use of carnelian beads, rather than the more common lapis lazuli beads, also sets apart her style of ornaments, particularly her beaded cape. The physical attributes of Puabi's set of ornaments, including the use of bold and contrastive colors, diversity of geometric and naturalistic forms, its sheer size (133 different ornaments, 5.7 kg of total hair and body ornaments) must have been immediately and visually impactful. In its basic aspects, Puabi's dress connected her to existing female fashions, and yet the abundance, scale, and unique shapes and color combinations of

her body additions and manipulations were unlike the dress of any other known female. The incorporation of distinct elements into these ornaments, such as long carnelian beads, demonstrated to have been manufactured in the Indus Valley region of modern India and Pakistan (see Mackay 1937; Kenoyer 1997; Parpola *et al.* 1977), showcased Puabi's ability to access and incorporate luxury, traded objects into her dress. Puabi also wore bearded bull amulets, an animal usually connected to male deities and rulers. Taken together, Puabi's dress combined elements of royal male, female, occupational fashions, also incorporating highly valued, traded materials, as part of the creation of a new royal, feminine fashion.

Like Puabi, another high status female, buried in grave PG 1054, dons ornaments with distinct color/material combinations such as gold and carnelian necklaces, a gold pin with carnelian head, and a gold frontlet with a chased rosette design. Her elaboration of female fashion relies less on an overwhelming increase in the number and size of head and body ornaments (such evident in Puabi's dress), and more on the wearing of distinct ornaments such as gold and carnelian necklaces and her unique gold and carnelian garment pin. She may have also worn weaponry at her waist, a standard part of male funerary attire, but unique for females, perhaps related to her high status and ability to contradict typical gendered fashions.

The existence of this high status fashion in Early Dynastic society, created through conscious alterations to existing gendered, occupational, and local fashions, and worn by a select few individuals, suggests that certain high-status individuals, including probable ruling elites, were principle players in the creation of new fashions and the initiation and direction of fashion trends. Through creating a new and higher standard for dress, recognizable with reference to other fashions, but also distinct from them, high status ruling figures became "fashion icons," social actors capable of embodying the highest existing standards of fashion. Through the connections between royal, male fashions and standard male fashions and military "outfits," male rulers emerged as masculine and military icons, and by combining elements of royal and divine fashions, such as in hair/beard and clothing styles, male rulers asserted their power as approximating that of the divine. The alterations to dress that comprised high status fashions, such as through wearing more gold, distinctive hairstyles, and larger sized ornaments, could have only been undertaken by a select group of elites with high levels of social and material access enabling them to acquire and wear expensive and exotic materials acquired through long-distance trade and transport. The recognition and legitimization of rulers, particularly of kings (see Baines and Yoffee 1998; Cohen 2005; Steinkeller 1999; Yoffee 1995), seems to be directly correlated with their status as fashion icons, individuals perhaps capable of commanding and controlling the acquisition and distribution of highly valued, exotic goods, and of employing such resources in the building of their own social and political position and prestige.

The existence of high status female fashions in Early Dynastic period, particularly as evident in female royal graves at Ur, but also suggested in visual depictions of high

Museum No.	Object	Material	Qty
B17711a	Hair Ribbon	Gold	1 (in pieces)
B17701-10	Wreath-Poplar Leaves	Gold, Lapis, Carnelian	2
B17708	Wreath-Ring Pendants	Gold, Lapis, Carnelian	1
B17711	Wreath-Willow Leaves, Flowers	Gold, Lapis, Carnelian	1
B16693	Comb with Seven Rosettes	Gold, Lapis	1
B16992A-B	Hair-rings	Gold	2
98-9-9a-b	Hair-rings	Gold	2
B17712A-B	Earrings	Gold	2
83-7-1-87	Choker with Rosette	Gold, Lapis	1
83-7-1-88	Collar	Gold, Lapis, Carnelian	1
B16694	Necklace	Gold, Lapis	1
B16726	Beads/Amulet	Lapis, Carnelian	1
121419	Beads/Amulet	Lapis	1
121405-7	Amulets	Gold, Lapis	4
83-7-1-(1-86)	Beaded Cloak	Gold, Silver, Lapis, Carnelian	1
B17292	Cuff	Lapis, Carnelian	1
B17063	Belt with Rings	Gold, Lapis, Carnelian	1
121494	Thigh Beads	Gold, Lapis, Carnelian	1
B16783	Garter	Gold, Lapis, Carnelian	1
B16717	Finger Rings	Gold, Lapis	9
121544-5, B16728	Cylinder Seals	Lapis	3
B16729, B16908, 121352-3	Garment Pins	G, L	4

Figure 10: Full inventory of dress worn by primary burial in Puabi's grave (PG 800) in the Royal Cemetery of Ur.

status females, perhaps rulers or cultic practitioners throughout the Early Dynastic sphere, suggests a class of female elites also existed in Early Dynastic society and that the fashions they embodied were necessary and crucial element of their attainment of such enhanced social status. Puabi of Ur provides perhaps the best evidence for the existence of such female rulers, who like their male counterparts were social figures able to create and embody the highest of social fashions and initiate and drive fashion trends.

Early Dynastic Social Uniforms

Standardized dress or “outfits” associated with certain occupational and social classes (see above) are evident in the visual evidence, and clearly apparent in the late Early Dynastic graves at Ur. The two most clearly defined types include those worn by guards/soldiers and by female attendants in royal death pits. The standardized outfits worn by these professional classes may have been intended to enable their wearers to continue to act in their appropriate social roles in the netherworld, such as providing service and protection for high status royal figures (see Katz 2003: 235). The wearing of

“uniforms,” or the patterned wearing of ornament sets by multiple individuals occupying similar social roles/occupations, suggests that certain fashions became associated with, even embedded within certain social and political institutions in Early Dynastic society. The existence of such uniforms also perhaps implies that choices of dress and adornment became increasingly restricted (canalized) during late Early Dynastic times, and that a class of ruling elites, identified by their own high-status fashions, had a measure of social control over others’ choices about what to wear. Similarities between occupationally standardized dress and high status fashions, such as military regalia and elaborate headdresses, indicate that social controls over dress that set the standards of acceptable fashions involved references to religious and political ideologies. The existence of standardized or uniform dress also reveals something of the process of how individuals and entire social groups in Early Dynastic society were defined and how they came to be embedded in public institutions, producing the type of subjectivity – through dress, behavior, and other means – needed to establish and sustain these institutions. The co-emergence of standardized, occupational and class related dress and of high status fashion by the late Early Dynastic phase was an essential component, even perhaps a primary instigator, of profound social and political developments in Early Dynastic society, ultimately resulting in the creation of a new, heretofore unseen class of ruling and social elites capable of employing new methods of social control, including regulations in dress and creating new social fashions, as part of legitimizing new leadership and subordinate roles in society.

Conclusion: The Social Significance Early Dynastic Fashions

This brief account of Early Dynastic dress and fashion reveals that, rather than existing as trivial aspects of society, both were active, even critical elements in important social, political, and historical developments in Early Dynastic society. With reference to the evidence of dress from Early Dynastic cities, it is possible to glimpse the creation of distinct social roles and classes and the building of increasingly complex social institutions. These insights are made apparent by viewing dress and fashion as connected and dynamic social entities, existing at the crucial intersection of the individual and the social, and thus a necessary part of the construction of each. Patterns in the evidence of dress, revealing of Early Dynastic fashion trends towards greater elaboration, standardization, and regionalization, provide previously unknown insight into the process of building and institutionalizing the increasingly complex and regimented social categories, roles, and institutions defining of late Early Dynastic society. Among the most prominent, influential, and lasting of these roles was the institution of kingship, and perhaps also queenship (see Beld 2002). Individuals, both males and females, asserted themselves in these roles, in part

through their embodiment of new, high status fashions, signifying their social and material access and their ability to create new fashions and drive fashion trends as part of their newfound social role and power. The parallel emergence of socially regimented or standardized fashions associated with specific occupational groups likely attached to this high-status ruling class, demonstrates the types of new social controls available to Early Dynastic leaders that were essential to the formation of distinct social, economic, and political classes characteristic of society in the earliest civilizations of Mesopotamia. Tensions and trends in fashions within and between Early Dynastic cities reveal the complexity of the process of creating and maintaining these social institutions and divisions. Finding fashions in Early Dynastic dress, thus, is a productive, even essential avenue of insight into social and political developments at a crucial place and significant moment in history, helping to both “re-envision” the individuals that were part of these developments and apprehending the far-reaching implications of their decisions of what or what not to wear.

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Stephanie M. Langin-Hooper

Terracotta Figurines and Social Identities in Hellenistic Babylonia

Abstract: Terracotta figurines are proposed as a particularly useful object corpus through which to access social identities in Hellenistic Babylonia. Cross-cultural interaction between Greeks and Babylonians has traditionally been the primary interest of scholars researching this society, and figurines were often recruited as evidence for the opposition of ethnic identities. In this work, a new approach to the figurines is proposed, which deemphasizes the categorical rigidity of typology and substitutes a flexible methodology of accessing multiple inter-object entanglements. A particular case study of “nude heroic” figurines (which are often considered evidence for display of cultural difference) is explored in detail, utilizing the entanglement approach. This research reveals that the hybrid qualities of objects were often selected with a sensitivity to both Greek and Babylonian cultural traditions, and with the aim of mutual acceptability. The evidence presented indicates that ethnicity-based concerns were not always the paramount interests in Hellenistic Babylonian identity formation, nor the primary way in which that society was divided.

Keywords: cross-cultural interaction, hybridity, post-colonial, entanglement, terracotta figurines, Hellenistic Babylonia

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Introduction

There is a growing awareness among scholars that the material world plays an important role in shaping a person's identity. Objects do not just reflect the ideals of the society that creates them, but also influence people by physically embodying and actively participating in the shaping of social norms. Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines are a particularly suitable group of objects through which to access social roles in the Hellenistic Babylonian period. Terracotta figurines were a widely available kind of object made from a readily obtainable material. As miniature representations of human bodies, figurines also provided immediate and obvious connections to the corporeality of their human interlocutors, allowing for mutual identity sharing between object and user. Terracotta figurines thus have an especially rich potential to inform on a variety of social identities.

When considering social identity in Hellenistic Babylonia, most scholars have concentrated on the issue of cross-cultural interaction. For many, the Hellenistic period marks the end of the “ancient” Near East, as Babylonia and the rest of the former Persian Empire came under Greek rule. The dividing line that scholarship draws at 330 BCE is significant – it implies that the influx of Greek culture was of a fundamentally different nature, with vastly more transformative potential, than the population migrations or political regime changes of earlier Mesopotamian history. Our understanding of cultural identities during this period, and our interest in the exchanges between cultural groups, are thus foregrounded in this modern perspective on Hellenistic Babylonian society.

Terracotta figurines are a valuable tool for exploring issues of cross-cultural interaction, as these Hellenistic Babylonian objects display a wide spectrum of culturally-hybrid forms. However, previous approaches to this corpus of material, and to Hellenistic Babylonian social identities in general, have often been reductive. Cultural identity has been conceived of as an either/or scenario, in which “being Greek” or “being Babylonian” are mutually exclusive. Such binary divisions are supported, and even necessitated, by the use of typologies as an organizational device for Hellenistic Babylonian objects.

I propose moving beyond typology, toward a concept of object entanglement, where connections between objects are the flexible and fluid, active creations of human-object interaction. When we approach figurines through entanglements, a richer and more nuanced view of cross-cultural interaction becomes possible. One case study of entangled figurines will be explored in depth. Through this example, instances of cross-cultural hybridity are revealed to be more than just a happenstance conglomeration of Greek and Babylonian features. In many cases, hybrid interactions within the figurines seem to have drawn upon shared cultural values, in order to resonate in very special ways with their audiences. By utilizing the concept of entanglements, we can get at cross-cultural interactions in a more detailed and subtle manner – which, in turn, allows us to get closer to answering the underlying questions of how, and in what way, these social interactions took place.

When the concept of entanglements is utilized to analyze the terracotta figurines, we can also see that there were other, additional social roles and identities that mattered in Hellenistic Babylonian society. Cross-cultural interaction was just one of many factors in a larger spectrum of social relations. Thus, to only focus on cross-cultural interactions loses sight of the bigger picture, in which Hellenistic Babylonian communities were made up of densely intersecting networks of varied identity affiliations.

The Hellenistic Period

The Hellenistic period in Babylonia began with the conquests of Alexander the Great, who between 333 and 330 BCE marched from Asia Minor through Mesopotamia to

defeat the Persian Empire. He designated the ancient Mesopotamian city of Babylon as the capital of his new empire (Sherwin-White 1987: 9). Following Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his massive conquests were broken up by his generals into several successor kingdoms (Walbank 1981: 46). Most of the Near East, encompassing the land from the Mediterranean Levant to modern Iran and Central Asia, was taken by one general, Seleucus, who was a Macedonian Greek married to Apame, an elite Persian woman (Green 1990: 319). During the reigns of King Seleucus I and his multi-ethnic descendants, Greek people immigrated to Babylonian cities.

Around 300 BCE, the Seleucid kings moved the capital of the empire from Babylon to the newly founded city of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Although this transfer of the seat of power demoted Babylon from its long-held position of dominant city in the region, it did not destroy the city, nor did it entail its abandonment.¹ Babylon was situated on the Euphrates River, only 60 km from Seleucia, which (as its name implies) was located on the Tigris River, with a royal canal built between the two cities (Sherwin-White 1987: 18–19). Each city occupied a strategic location, and jointly they could control trade and commerce along the two major rivers that led upstream into northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia, and downstream to the Persian Gulf. Babylonia thus maintained the important position it held under the Achaemenids (539–330 BCE), becoming the thriving heart of the Seleucid Empire as well. These political events and the arrival of Greek populations represented a significant social change that we currently define as the beginning of the Hellenistic period.

The end date of this period is more difficult to fix. The Seleucid Empire gradually lost sections of their easternmost territories due to invasions by the Parthians. The capital city of Seleucia, as well as Babylon, was conquered by the Parthian king Mithradates around 141 BCE (Shipley 2000: 321). The Seleucid Empire continued to exist in its western territories, with the secondary capital of Antioch-on-the-Orontes taking over as the royal seat until its eventual annexation by the Romans in 64 BCE (Green 1990: 547–65, 724). However, despite the conquest of Babylonia by the Parthians, cultural and social changes appear to have been slow in coming. In their coinage, Parthian kings styled themselves in the manner of the Seleucids, including the use of the royal diadem (Simonetta 2007: 51–53). Cuneiform documents were still written in the traditional Babylonian temples and elite communities.² Greek styles

1 The idea that Babylon was abandoned, or even forcibly depopulated in an effort to transfer inhabitants to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, has been previously held by several scholars. This view has been amended through the work of Van der Spek (1993) on Seleucid-era astronomical diaries. For a full discussion of this scholarly confusion, as well as the evidence for the continued occupation of Babylon, see Sherwin-White 1987.

2 The last datable tablet was written in 75 CE, although some priests and scholars may have been literate in Sumerian and Akkadian into the third century CE (Geller 1997). While the tablet written in 75 CE is generally recognized as a late survivor, cuneiform scribal practice flourished in the third and second centuries BCE (see Doty 1977 for discussion of evidence, most especially from Hellenistic Uruk).

persisted in some arts (Invernizzi 2007: 129–33). Based on this cultural continuity, I follow many other scholars who work on Hellenistic Babylonia in including the early Parthian era (c. 171 BCE–51 CE) as part of the “Hellenistic period.”³

“Greeks” and “Babylonians”

The archaeological evidence for the presence of Greek peoples in Babylon, Seleucia and the surrounding cities includes new buildings, such as theaters and gymnasia (Van der Spek 1987), as well as small-scale finds such as statues, pottery, and coins.⁴ There is also substantial archaeological evidence to indicate that the native Babylonian communities were still in existence – for instance, traditional Babylonian temples were rebuilt (Hannestad and Potts 1990; Downey 1988) and documents written in Akkadian were still used to record some economic transactions (see footnote 2). The presence of both communities made for a multi-cultural situation in the cities of Hellenistic Babylonia.

This multi-cultural environment in Hellenistic Babylonia has often been interpreted as a tense and polarized state of affairs, in which Greek and Babylonian communities were at odds with one another. Taking the more recent, colonial interactions between Europe and the Middle East as a model, scholars have proposed a situation of Greek versus Babylonian: in other words, a situation of antagonistic encounters between dominant Greek colonizers and a resistant native population of Babylonians. In such a “dualist conception of colonialism,” cross-cultural communities (like Hellenistic Babylonia) are represented “as a confrontation between two essentially distinct entities, each of which is internally homogenous and externally bounded” (van Dommelen 1997: 308). When this model of colonizer versus colonized has been applied to the Near East, interest has lain “in tracing the progress of Greek objects across the lands originally conquered by Alexander, and in watching eagerly for signs of ‘Hellenic influence’ pervading native traditions” (Alcock 1993: 163). Such evidence of Greek (or Greek-looking) objects has been used to reinforce the notion of Greek cultural domination, which was thought to be successful to a greater or lesser degree across the Hellenized East based on the strength or weakness of the native resistance.

Terracotta figurines have often been used as evidence in these models of Greek domination over native Babylonians. Large numbers of figurines were recorded by the

Clancier (2011) argues that the continued use of cuneiform for scholarly and literary production as well as for administrative and legal documentation is one outcome of the mutually beneficial relationship resulting from the liaison between members of the Mesopotamian urban elite with the Hellenistic powers.

³ Dates as outlined by Keall (1970: 8).

⁴ A brief selection of useful references: Invernizzi 2007; Valtz 1993; Petrie 1997; Rostovtzeff 1932; McDowell 1935; Colledge 1987; Potts 1997: 276–301.

early excavators of these sites, as well as addressed in various specialist volumes devoted to cataloguing and describing them. Even in early excavation work, the presence of both Greek and Babylonian styles, motifs, and techniques throughout the figurine corpus suggested these objects as a locus for cultural display. For instance, Koldewey, excavator of Babylon, analyzed Hellenistic Babylonian figurines as stylistically separate from earlier Babylonian figurines, and made an attempt to discern the cultural origins of the “griechischer Zeit” figurine motifs and features (Koldewey 1925: 64).

Early interpretations of Greek and Babylonian elements in the figurines focused on such features as evidence of ethnic division in Hellenistic Babylonian communities.⁵ Legrain (1930), in his catalogue of the Nippur figurines, discusses the Hellenistic period corpus as the figurines of “The Greek Domination.” Legrain divides these figurines by the extent to which they were more faithful to Greek originals (labeled as the “pure Greek figures”)⁶ or more provincial pieces (labeled as the “figures dressed in a Greek style”) (Legrain 1930: 11). Van Ingen, in her work on the figurines of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, similarly concludes that Babylonian and Greek artistic interests and cultures existed in parallel. Van Ingen does go further at some points in her analysis; for instance, she recognizes that, in some later figurines, “there is a merging of Greek and Oriental (Greek types done in Oriental style and vice versa, or a more hybrid style)” (Van Ingen 1939: 8). However, even this observation does not seem to have caused her to reconsider the Greek versus Oriental dichotomy in her list of figurine types.

Ziegler (1962) addresses the implications of cross-cultural hybridity more directly in her work on the Uruk figurines. She designates certain figurines as “babylonische Typen,” but in her discussion of figurines with Greek visualizations, she hesitates to call them Greek types, but rather remarks that they are “den von der griechischen Kultur beeinflussten Formen” (Ziegler 1962: 175, 176). When discussing some of these “Greek-influenced forms,” such as figurines depicting a man holding a club and draped with a lion pelt, Ziegler also judges that one such terracotta was “eine mißverständene Nachahmung einer Herakles-figur” (1962: 176). Ziegler seems to be suggesting that people of Greek descent were not participating in the creation of Hellenistic Uruk figurines, but rather that native Babylonian people were producing poorly executed copies of Greek art that misunderstood the forms and meanings of the dominant, colonizing culture’s style. This imitation/adoption model of cross-cultural interaction (Gosden 2004; Langin-Hooper 2007) in which members of the native

5 The distinction of Greek versus Babylonian (the terms favored by Koldewey 1925) was alternately framed as a divide between late period (meaning both/either Hellenistic and Parthian period) and earlier Babylonian figurines (the terms favored by Loftus 1857; Hilprecht 1904; and Watelin and Langdon 1934).

6 Although, for the vast majority of Hellenistic Babylonian figurines, “originals” for the “Greek” types are not found among the figurines from the Greek mainland.

culture are thought to have consciously taken on the visual attributes of their colonizers (in other words, to have Hellenized themselves), begins to carve out social space for the existence of hybrid figurines. However, it also retains the underlying assumption of sharp ethnic divides in Hellenistic Babylonian society, and precludes any kind of substantive interaction between the two cultures.

More recent works, such as those of Invernizzi (1970–71; 1985), Karvonen-Kannas (1995), and Menegazzi (2007), have been more delicate in their approach to the cross-cultural make-up of Hellenistic Babylonian society. These scholars suggest that cross-cultural interaction might not have been the same in every community or city of Babylonia, and Invernizzi (1970–71) extensively reviews the localized variations in the figurines. However, these scholars all retain the notion of culture-based divisions in the figurine corpora: Invernizzi (1985) divides the figurines of Seleucia into “Hellenistic” and “Mesopotamian,” with an acknowledgement that these features could be “sometimes mixed” (1985: 98). Karvonen-Kannas (1995) similarly divides the Babylon figurines into “Traditional Mesopotamian Types,” “Persian’ Types,” “Western Types,” etc.; a “New Variations” type is included, but without an exploration of the cross-cultural interaction that would have made such figurines possible. Menegazzi, in her discussion of the figurines from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, is also consistent in noticing and describing cross-cultural hybridity in the figurines; her discussion of cultural exchange in the figurines as “basato sulla coesistenza e sul dialogo fra elementi di origine diversa” speaks to her nuanced viewpoint in interpreting that hybridity (Menegazzi 2007:129). However, in articulating this hybridity, Menegazzi tends to focus on figurines as evidence of Greek cultural diffusion and Hellenization (“capillare capacità di penetrazione della cultura greca”), with the implication that Greek culture was impressed upon the local people (Menegazzi 2007: 133).

Postcolonial theory, deriving from the work of Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994), has been beneficial in illuminating the ways in which the modern European history of entrenched culture clashes between East and West have colored our understanding of the past. A major feature of postcolonial theories has been an “attempt to identify and weed out colonial habits of thought within the western intellectual tradition” (Gosden 2001: 243). The works of Said have been particularly influential in this respect, as he has identified many of the underlying assumptions made in the Western cultural mindset concerning the former colonial subjects (particularly the cultures of Middle Eastern colonies) of Western imperial powers, which were used for “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1978: 3).

In addition to deconstructing many imperial-based biases, postcolonial theorists have also created a new understanding of the varied processes that operated in ancient colonial situations. There are two major features that unite postcolonial theories and form the background of postcolonial thought. The first is a non-essentialist view of culture, in which cross-cultural similarities and differences are interpreted as gradients, rather than utilized to create artificial boundaries between distinct and discrete cultural groups. The second feature of postcolonial thought develops from this non-

essentialist view and posits that colonial situations are characterized by cross-cultural negotiation. This process builds on the underlying similarities between the cultures to create new, shared meanings for traditions and objects. Communities involved in cross-cultural negotiation also actively engaged in a “reworking of various elements rather than merely combining two complete cultures,” and invented completely new cultural elements (van Dommelen 1997: 309). This process could lead to the production of objects, such as figurines, which we now view as cross-culturally hybrid.

Through postcolonial theory, more recent scholars have begun to develop alternative models of cross-cultural interaction between Greeks and Babylonians. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) have been most influential in pointing out the deficiencies in earlier, simplistic approaches to modelling cultural interaction in the Hellenistic East, and in calling for newer, more nuanced analyses of those processes. In so doing, they and others have stressed the importance of “avoid[ing] the reductionist tendencies inherent in the traditional overarching definitions of ‘Hellenism’ and ‘Hellenisation’” (Petrie 2002: 86). Postcolonial approaches have also been applied to the terracotta figurines of Hellenistic Babylonia, by both myself (Langin-Hooper 2007) and Westh-Hansen (2011). Both works propose that a division of figurines by cultural origin of motifs lacks typological soundness, as alternate typologies can be devised which demonstrate pervasive cross-cultural hybridity throughout the figurine types.

The introduction of postcolonial discourse into the study of Hellenistic Babylonian figurines has added theoretical depth to the study of these objects. However, concepts of cultural interaction and hybrid exchange have not yet been pushed to their most productive extent. Rather than simply identifying instances of hybridity, I propose that postcolonial thought, in concert with materiality theory, can be used to probe the meaningfulness of hybridity itself. How does hybridity develop, and why does it matter? In order to answer these questions, I turn now to a more detailed and nuanced look at the terracotta figurine evidence, which holds more information about cross-cultural interaction than has previously been accessed or interrogated.

Why do figurines matter?

Terracotta figurines are one of the most ubiquitous art forms of Hellenistic Babylonia, and potentially one of the most informative on issues of cross-cultural interaction. The presence of Greek and Babylonian features throughout this corpus has long been recognized, thus placing them as a significant piece of evidence indicating a Greek and Babylonian society. But beyond their capacity for bearing culturally specific features, figurines have other physical attributes and interactive qualities that make them particularly well-connected to the identities of their human interlocutors.

Terracotta figurines reached a much wider audience than most other art forms in Hellenistic Babylonia, because they were cheap and easy to make. Immense numbers of these objects were found at Babylon, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Uruk, and Nippur;

between these four cities, thousands of Hellenistic period figurines have been recovered. Smaller numbers of figurines have also been excavated from Hellenistic period levels at Kish and Borsippa. Taken together, these figurines represent one of the largest corpora of objects known from Hellenistic Babylonia. The vast quantities of figurines discovered across the cities of Hellenistic Babylonia indicate that they were widely available to a broad swath of people. Also, because figurines were inexpensive, they were made, used, and discarded often – indeed, the vast majority of figurines have been discovered in trash deposits. This means that, of all the arts of Hellenistic Babylonian society, the styles and motifs of terracotta figurines had the potential to respond most quickly to changes and evolutions in cross-cultural interactions.

Figurines are also a particularly useful corpus for the study of multiculturalism because of the intimate relationship between this kind of art and its human viewer. As Pollock (2003: 182) has put it: “why do we like looking at images of other human beings? ... An image of another or even ourselves might have no meaning or actually threaten us. There must be a reason for and a mechanism by which we delight in images, especially those that are ‘like’ us, human images.” This power to entrance and engage – a power that all human images share – is given peculiar emphasis in figurines because of their miniature size (Bailey 2005: 33–41). Miniature human images can not only be viewed, but they can also be *possessed*, in a complete physical sense that goes beyond mere ownership to a mastery that is attained when a tiny “person” can be grasped in the hand (Bailey 2005: 38–39, 70). The power to control a miniature human is alluring, and through this emotional bond, the figurine’s owner is also subject to a reciprocal relationship with the object. Physical contact with a miniature human body establishes a deeply personal – as well as mutual – connection, similar to that experienced when touching a real human body (Bailey 2005: 38). The intimate interactivity and potential for subject-object co-identification that figurines provide make them ideal objects through which to investigate personal and social identity.

The idea of a powerful connection existing between a person and a terracotta figurine would have been particularly at home in a Hellenistic Babylonian context. Anthropomorphic figurines were commonly used in Mesopotamian rituals to stand in for living people, whether a particular individual, such as in the *maqlû* incantations against witches (Abusch 2002), or the entire Babylonian population, as in the purification of the *Esagila* temple for the *akîtu* festival (Bidmead 2002: 54–59). The practice of using figurines as human substitutes was undoubtedly intertwined with the mimetic quality of figurines, which visually approximate the human body (albeit in miniature). However, additional links between people and terracotta figurines are suggested by some versions of Mesopotamian creation myths, in which clay is often featured as a substance used by the gods to create human bodies. In *Atrahasis*, for instance, all human beings are created from a mixture of clay and divine flesh (Dalley 2000: 15); in a similar fashion, the goddess Aruru creates Gilgamesh’s uncivilized companion Enkidu from a pinch of clay (George 1999: 4–5). Several other cultures of the ancient

world also believed in a primordial connection between clay and the human body; most notably for the purposes of this paper, Greek mythology refers to clay as the formative material used in the creation of Pandora, as recounted in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (West 1999: 38–39). Thus, the idea that human beings and clay figurines were deeply connected, both in shape and in substance, would likely have had resonance with both the Greek and Babylonian components of Hellenistic Babylonian culture.

Beyond Typology: “Entanglement” as a New Approach to Figurine Groupings

In order to utilize this rich potential of terracotta figurines as bearers of social identity concerns, I suggest that we need to approach the entire issue of cross-cultural interaction in a more detailed and subtle way. Combinations of Greek and Babylonian features within the Hellenistic Babylonian terracotta figurines were myriad. As has been previously described, both Greek and Babylonian styles, motifs, and manufacturing techniques were drawn upon in order to create a variety of hybrid art pieces (Langin-Hooper 2007; Westh-Hansen 2011). For instance, double molds (originally a Greek technology) were used to create Babylonian-looking figurines of women supporting their breasts. In other cases, Babylonian poses of women carrying infants were combined with Greek style drapery and hairstyles. Few of these hybridities were superficial; in fact, most would have required an in-depth exposure to the tools and techniques of each cultures' coroplastic craft, as well as a significant re-thinking of form and motif, in order to produce structurally sound and visually coherent figurines.

For instance, in order for a traditionally Babylonian figurine form of a woman supporting her breasts to be created in a double mold, not only does the manufacturer need to know how to make and use a double mold, he/she must also invent a modeled backside (complete with human anatomy, costuming, and hairstyle) for this previously flat-backed form. To account for the multiple versions of such figurines that were produced and used, there must additionally have been a sufficient audience of figurine users within society willing to accept this complex interplay (and new invention) of cultural forms. Thus, the in-depth exchange within the figurines signaled that Greeks and Babylonians were not living in separate communities with antagonistic relationships, but rather that members of both groups interacted across a richly multicultural society. My earlier research sought to create new typological structures to more accurately reflect this situation. This typology did not divide figurines into “Greek” and “Babylonian” categories, but rather could accommodate cross-cultural combinations of features, as well as hybrid developments of new forms (Langin-Hooper 2007).

Yet, is it sufficient to point out that many Hellenistic Babylonian figurines are hybrid? To assign new labels to figurines – in other words, to call them “hybrid”

instead of “Greek” or “Babylonian” – allows for a greater variety of figurine forms to be recognized by scholars. However, without additional analytical depth, the use of the “hybrid” label does not advance our understanding much further concerning how or why cross-cultural figurines were participants in ancient social worlds, nor does it get much closer to accessing society identities.

I suggest that this limitation derives, at least in part, from the typological structure with which Hellenistic Babylonian terracotta figurines are usually ordered, and from which hybridity is deduced. Although helpful organization tools, typologies are also a limited – and limiting – approach to inter-object association. A typology is built on a series of nested assumptions: everyday categories are natural and self-evident; the best way for scholars to study ancient objects is to systematize these natural, everyday categories through the naming of “types” and the creation of a typology; and these typological schemas can be projected back into the past as if they were ahistorical and therefore universal.

Each of these assumptions can be unpacked and shown to be problematic. As described by Keane (2005: 188), all objects have innumerable qualities (such as color, shape, texture, flammability, hardness, etc.) that are bundled together to compose the complete materiality of the object. When a person arranges objects into types, he or she privileges certain features of the object (which are considered instrumental in deciding what type of object it is) and ignores (or considers irrelevant) other features of the object. However, the non-type-determining features remain bundled with the other attributes, even if ignored by the current object user in his or her process of classification. At another time, place, or by another person, the ignored qualities could become selected as relevant and privileged in defining a new purpose, name and function for the same object.

New systems of signification and new typologies can thus arise around features of an object that were previously considered to be irrelevant. There are many overlapping and competing ways of organizing objects – a typological flexibility that is routinely utilized, even if we do not consciously realize it (Bowker and Star 1999: 2–3). Because the bundled qualities of an object are always multiple – indeed, too numerous to be comprehensively listed or classified – the ways in which an object can potentially be categorized are practically limitless. Object pluralism allows for the existence of “many equally legitimate ways of dividing the world into kinds” (Meskell 2004: 42; also Dupré 1993).

Typologies make it difficult to think about this multiplicity of inter-object associations, because in order for a typology to be created, scholars must choose to consistently privilege some object similarities over others. Often this happens along lines familiar to the modern typologizer, resulting in the application of modern categories to ancient objects. When we use categories such as “standing nude female” – categories that we may feel comfortable with in our own lives – and apply these to ancient figurines, we unwittingly retroject categories onto the past as if they were universal. The use of a typology, in particular, encourages reductive approaches to the material,

such as binary divisions (that is, clothed/naked or male/female). Then, through the structural division of typologies into categories and sub-categories, these assessments about figurine features are cemented into a hierarchical ranking of more and less important similarities. In this way, the core organizing principles underlying typology can hinder our understanding of the richly textured and varied associations between figurines.

As one way forward, I propose a new system of accessing inter-object associations, based on a theory of object entanglement. “Entanglement” is a concept that is currently used in anthropological and archaeological literature, most significantly by Hodder (2011; 2012), but also by scholars such as Thomas (1991), Gosden (2011) and, less explicitly (through material engagement theory), Renfrew (2001). In these usages, “entanglement” usually refers to the mutual entrapment between the human and object worlds, which come into being, shape, and even depend upon each other. “Entangled” is also used, such as by Stockhammer (2012), as a substitute for “hybrid” in describing specifically cross-cultural objects. In my approach, I deploy the term “entanglement” to talk about the associations between all objects (regardless of their degree of cross-culturalism), highlighting interconnection and similarity as opposed to interdependence and functionality. While this is a slightly different inflection than other scholars have given this term, its meanings (and the social processes which underlie it) are similar. In this usage, the term “entanglement” expresses the varying connections between figurines – some figurines are more stylistically similar than others, some figurines have a more similar size, weight or fragility, some have more similar motifs. None of these potential inter-object associations needs to be privileged over others, as any of them might have been significant to a particular ancient user at a particular moment of human-object interaction.

To look at three figurines from Nippur as an example: CBS 1952⁷ (Fig. 1) is usually grouped with CBS 2858 (Fig. 2), as their predominant feature is the female gender. Indeed, as Legrain (1930: 20–21) catalogued them, these figurines are included as numbers 110 and 116, respectively, in a section of the typology for “Babylonian ladies” (clothed or partly clothed female figurines). CBS 1954 (Fig. 3) is seen as a separate figurine type – a “tambourine player” – and in Legrain’s catalogue several other figurine types, such as “Herakles” and “warriors,” are placed between it and the entries for CBS 1952 and CBS 2858 (Legrain 1930: 22). However, my approach of investigating entanglements allows for other connections. For instance, CBS 1952 can also be grouped – or “entangled” – with CBS 1954, with which it shares features such as the tripartite headdress and posture of holding the hand(s) to the chest. This collection of shared features may even make these two figurines more closely associated in the eyes of an ancient user than the more traditional, gender-based typological connection.

⁷ All figurines in this article are referred to by their museum number in an effort to avoid restrictive and subjective labeling.



Figure 1: CBS 1952. Height: 19.3 cm, Width: 6 cm. Photograph by author, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The language used here to describe these figurines and their features might at first strike the reader as deliberately artificial, because it requires the breakdown of so many layers of assumptions and interpretations that we bring to the material. For instance, the word “feature-bundles” is used to talk about groups of features that were consistently entangled together. But the phrasing assists in drawing out the parallels



Figure 2: CBS 2858. Height: 11.3 cm, Width: 5.2 cm. Photograph by author, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

between objects and allowing new connections to be made beyond those first recognized as giving an object its identity and purpose. These inter-object associations have existed all along in the figurines, but might have been overlooked from the perspective of a modern, Western scholar, who has been culturally conditioned to engage with objects in ways that are specific to our own time and place. Using a concept of entanglements allows a variety of associations between objects to be made, some along traditional typological lines, and some which differ considerably from the traditional approaches to these objects.

Drawing upon entanglements provides a deliberately subtle and flexible approach that is not intended to be all-encompassing (nor is such comprehensiveness even possible). It cannot lead to a complete accounting of all associations between objects, nor does it approximate every way in which an ancient viewer or user might approach and interact with a figurine. It also remains open, so that the ideas and approaches of future scholars who consider the material – as well as Hellenistic



Figure 3: CBS 1954. (Cast from original.) Height: 9.3 cm, Width: 6.2 cm.
 Photograph by author, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum
 of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Babylonian figurines that might be discovered in future archaeological excavations – can be incorporated. This deliberate flexibility allows for more possibilities to be accessed – possibilities which, through their multitude, have the potential to approach ancient social realities.

The various possibilities for inter-object connection allowed by a concept of figurine entanglements become a particularly productive site for scholarly inquiry in cases where a web of connections seems to be shared repeatedly, with many objects sharing the same sets of feature-bundles. These I have termed the “popular” or “trendy” associations between figurines. While any connection between figurines might have been important to an individual ancient person, the associations that were particularly trendy were those most likely to have been meaningful to at least some

portion of the Hellenistic Babylonian population. In these trendy entanglements, we can begin to access how figurines participated in the creation of social roles, norms, and ideals.

Entanglements within the Hellenistic Babylonian Figurines: A Case Study of Mature Masculinity and Lion Hunting

A case study exploring a group of entangled figurines demonstrates one particular way in which hybridity was meaningful in Hellenistic Babylonia. Through this case study it becomes clear that trendy figurines were often not only hybrid, but also hybrid *with a purpose*. Hellenistic Babylonian hybrid figurines reveal a combination of entangled features that can be seen to be the result of inclusive impulses, in that their features would have been acceptable across ethnic divides. The existence of such hybrid figurines from Hellenistic Babylonia indicates that ethnically based categories of “Greek” and “Babylonian” were not always the most important divisions in society, nor were these categories necessarily set in opposition to one another. Rather, the terracotta figurines themselves were co-creators of a social reality in which ethnic and cultural difference could at times be smoothed over and made into a less operational part of daily life.

Nude, bearded males that are usually identified as the Greek god Herakles are one grouping of figurines that tends to be at the center of discussions of Greek versus Babylonian ethnic divisions in the figurine corpus. Yet even among these objects, cross-cultural exchange and mutual intelligibility seems to have been cultivated. In keeping with the methodological approach outlined in this article, I suggest that it is more productive to refer to these figurines not as “Herakles,” but as figurines which include a cluster of entangled features such as beards, male genitalia, nudity, carrying or wearing a cloak/lion pelt, and standing on a low plinth. As will be demonstrated in this section, a move away from the traditional typological label of “Herakles” facilitates recognition of the range of associations with which these figurines could engage – including connections with ancient Near Eastern lion-hunting heroes.

One figurine that shares this feature-bundle is M14884 (Fig. 4), found at the site of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. This figurine is labeled by Van Ingen in her Seleucia-on-the-Tigris figurines catalogue as “Resting Herakles” and is grouped with the “Various Types, Mostly of Greek Derivation,” which is a sub-set of the “Nude and Semidraped Men” category (Van Ingen 1939: 106–107). M14884 is a double molded figurine with detailed and highly three-dimensional modeling, although the surface is somewhat worn. The face is round and distinguished by a small but prominent nose. The hair appears thick and closely cropped; the beard is full and trimmed into a softly squared shape. The head is inclined downward and to the figure’s left. The figure stands in a

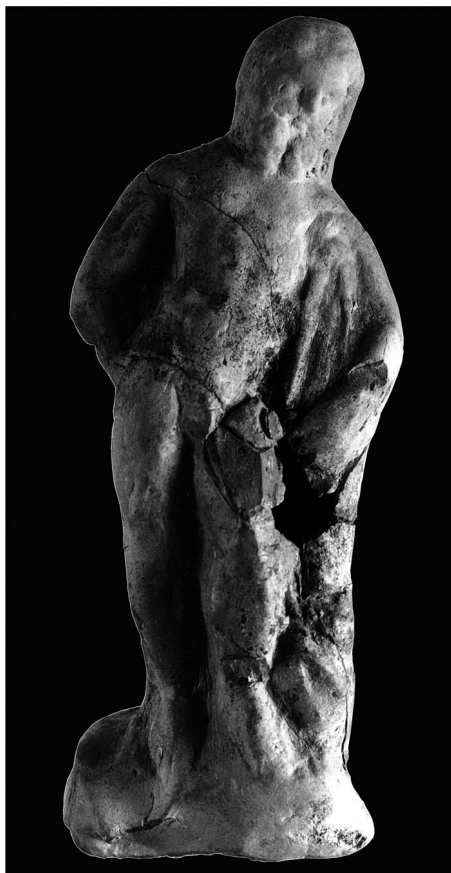


Figure 4: M14884. Height: 13.6 cm. Photograph courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan; reprinted with permission.

contraposto position, left shoulder angled downward. The left arm holds a club against the ground, over which a lion skin is draped. The right arm is bent and arches behind the back. The torso displays muscular definition, and the penis is carefully modeled. The right leg is straight and supports the weight of the figure, while the left leg is bent and positioned further forward. The feet of the figure blend into the low plinth or base, which is splayed wide to give the figure vertical stability. Despite this detailed frontal modeling, the back is given little attention (with the exception of the buttocks), and the backs of the legs are not modeled at all.

The above description is only meant to apply to M14884 as an individual object and does not constitute the definition of a type. Indeed, there is a cluster of closely entangled objects that share certain features with M14884, but also display a host of differences. Such associated figurines were excavated at several of the Babylonian cities (including Uruk, Babylon, and Nippur); however for the purposes of comparison – and to illustrate the wide variety of associated figurines at one site – the



Figure 5: B16934. Photograph courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan; reprinted with permission.

figurines discussed in this section are all from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. B16934 (Fig. 5), as another of these associated figurines from Seleucia, shares the beard, nakedness, male genitalia and lion pelt with M14884. However, the club is held in the right hand (not the left), a wreath is worn on the head, the contraposto stance is absent, the head is lifted upward, and the limbs are modeled in an openwork design that allows free space between the legs and the bend of the right arm. As another example, M15544 (Fig. 6) also shares a display of male genitalia with M14884, as well as the contraposto stance and defined abdominal musculature that B16934 lacks. However, M15544 has a more youthful and slender body, both a lion pelt and cloak are present, and it was made using a single mold. This last feature of M15544 is highly significant, as it means that this figurine has a completely unmodeled backside. It is unknown if M15544 would also have had a bearded face or a plinth to stand on, as the figurine is broken at both the neck and the ankles.

This small sample of three figurines, all of which come from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, demonstrates that there are significant shared features among the objects, but also substantial differences. There is no clear path to deciding which of these shared



Figure 6: M15544. Height: 9.5 cm, Width: 5.0 cm. Photograph by author, courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.

features should be privileged as most important. Should it be the contraposto pose, as this feature links the figurines to Greek statuary tradition? If so, B16934 would be removed from consideration, even though it is the only one of the three to wear a circular wreath, which would seem to connote Greek heritage. Alternately, should typological privilege be given to the use of the Greek-invented double mold, with the

potential for modeling the back half of the figurine? This feature allows terracotta figurines to function as miniature statues in the round, and thus would satisfy what is often regarded as “a typical Hellenistic concern for multiple viewpoints” (Connelly 1989: 153). However, neither of the two double molded figurines discussed above fully realizes the sculptural potential of this technique: the back of the legs on M14884 are left unmodeled, while B16934 is in a fully frontal stance that does not take advantage of the plastic, three-dimensional possibilities of double molding.⁸ In both instances, despite the potential for the Greek-introduced double-mold to create very different-looking figurines – which, in turn, could have been a locus for the display of ethnic division – in fact, these double-molded figurines look very similar to single-molded figurines, albeit with more vertical stability.

As the sample size is increased and comparable figurines from the other cities are included, the proliferation of similarities and differences grows still larger. This extreme diversity of figurine form, motif, and technique is especially characteristic of Hellenistic Babylonia (Invernizzi 1985: 97; Ristvet 2011), and makes the use of a typology particularly unhelpful for this corpus of objects. Entanglement, on the other hand, can be a productive concept here, for it does not require a rigid or absolute adherence to rules of form in order to recognize similarities between objects.

For instance, as described above, the three figurines discussed include a cluster of entangled features such as beards, male genitalia, nudity, carrying or wearing a cloak/lion pelt, and standing on a low plinth. Not all the features discussed were preserved in every figurine; for instance, it cannot be assumed that all these trendy features existed in the partially broken figurines (M15544 may not have originally had either a beard or a plinth). However, all of these figurines are interconnected through the sharing of at least some of these features – features which set these figurines apart from other trends, such as figurines shown holding musical instruments. These particular features also are more commonly shared than some of the other attributes of these objects – such as the contraposto pose or the double mold, which are shared only on a more limited basis. These features – the beards, male genitalia, nudity, carrying or wearing a cloak/lion pelt, and standing on a low plinth – seem to have been the more popular traits in antiquity, and thus I have chosen them for discussion as a potentially productive avenue of inquiry into social identity and issues of hybridity.

Two of these features in particular – the lion pelt and the plinth base – may help to lend insight into the cultural identity concerns that were bound up in these figurines. Many of these figurines are shown either wearing or holding a lion pelt, which could be draped over either arm. The head of the lion is often visible hanging

⁸ Differences in the execution of the modeling, physicality, and plasticity of the so-called “Herakles” figurines from Babylonia from similar figurines in Greece were also recognized by Klengel-Brandt (1993: 192).

near the figure's knee, while the pelt of the lion is stippled to show curled fur. In the case of the plinth, both the single and double mold techniques used to manufacture these figurines was manipulated in order to give the figurine considerable vertical stability. When the double mold was used, the hollow space between the two molded sides was often substantial, resulting in a large diameter base. When a single mold was used, the original mold was carved deeply, allowing the figurine to be molded in high relief and thus imparting a vertically-stable thickness to the figurine; the bottom of these single-molded figurines was often flared and pressed flat, in order to create a low plinth or base. Through this variety of techniques, vertical stability was almost universally imparted to these figurines. This indicates that the figurines were meant to stand in an attitude of vertical display, like statues.

One possible meaning for these display postures and leonine associations was that such figurines represented a god. As mentioned previously, most scholars identify this motif as a depiction of Herakles, and associate the contraposto pose and use of the double mold as traits typical of Hellenistic Greek figurine production. A similar bronze statue, measuring 85.5 cm high and named as the god Herakles/Verethraghna,⁹ was found at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris; this statue depicts a mature male, wearing a rounded full beard, standing in a contraposto pose with his hand on his right hip (Invernizzi, 2007: 64–65). The existence of both the statue and the figurines suggests that there was a popular appeal in Hellenistic Babylonia for figures that had close visual associations with the Greek god Herakles.

However, it is a different matter, and perhaps a step too far, to suggest that these figurines were evidence for a display of ethnic difference and division. These figurines are some of the only popular terracottas in Hellenistic Babylonia that have close visual links with Greek mythological figures. Figurines depicting other male gods popular in the Hellenistic world, such as Apollo or Dionysos,¹⁰ were uncommon in Hellenistic Babylonia (Karvonen-Kannas 1995: 82–84, 159). Many scholars have observed – but have been unable to convincingly explain – the contradiction between the official popularity of several Greek gods (Apollo, for instance, was worshipped as the ancestor of the Seleucid kings) and the “all the more surprising” fact that figurines of these gods “have not been discovered in greater numbers” (Karvonen-Kannas 1995: 84). This seeming contradiction also extends to the bronze statue from Seleucia (that was explicitly given the Greek name of Herakles, as well as a Parthian god name), which was dedicated in a temple to Apollo (Al-Salihi 1987). If Greek religious practice was the sole reason for the existence of figurines and statue(s) that visually approximated Herakles, then one might question why such representations

⁹ These two divine names for the statue were given in the Greek and Parthian inscriptions, respectively, on the statue's legs (Potter 1991: 278–79).

¹⁰ For a discussion of the general popularity of the Greek gods, especially Dionysos, in figurines throughout the rest of the Hellenistic world, see Ammerman 1990: 40–41.

were particularly successful when three-dimensional images of other gods, such as Apollo, were not.

One of the theories commonly offered to explain this apparent contradiction proposes that Herakles figurines were uniquely popular because they were used as votives by members of the Seleucid army. However, while one such figurine was found at the Faïlaka fortress (Connelly 1989: 152–153; Connelly 1990: 98–99), many similar figurines were found in various non-military domestic contexts in cities such as Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and Susa (Van Ingen 1939: 106–109). Additionally, a connection with a Greco-Macedonian military does not adequately explain why the particular prevalence of such figurines in the Hellenistic East (Babylonia, Susa, and the Persian Gulf)¹¹ outpaced the popularity of similar figurines in Hellenistic Greece and Egypt – regions that also supported massive military forces. Another hypothesis for the Babylonian popularity of “Herakles” figurines suggests that the syncretization of Herakles with the Mesopotamian god Nergal was responsible (Klengel-Brandt 1993: 198). However, this explanation seems overly specific, especially as Nergal was not one of the major gods of the Babylonian pantheon, and (as seen in the inscription from the Seleucia-on-the-Tigris statue) he was not the only Near Eastern god with which Herakles could be identified.

As an alternate explanation for the popularity of these figurines, I suggest that the basic assumption made by most modern scholars – that such figurines should be typologically classified as part of the Greek tradition of Herakles statuary – should be reconsidered. A “Herakles” identity may only have been one possible reading of these objects, and thus did not encapsulate the entire range of ancient meaning conceivable for this figurine trend. Greek connections could have been noticed and called to the fore by some viewers, but could also have been unknown, unnoticed, or considered unimportant by others.

To consider what alternative identifications might have been possible, I suggest concentrating on the potentially meaningful inclusion of the lion pelt detail (and, in some cases, the club, which could have evoked the hunting and killing of that lion). Attributes of lion hunting consistently appear in Hellenistic Babylonian figurines that visually approximate Herakles, whereas other details of Herakles iconography from the Greek tradition – such as the Apples of the Hesperides (seen in, for example, the Farnese Herakles statue) or even the more ubiquitous Late Classical and Hellenistic Greek focus on Herakles’ downturned head as an expression of his exhaustion and vulnerability – were much less commonly employed.¹² While the physical fatigue of semi-divine bodies or magical apples had little or no resonance in Babylonian tradi-

¹¹ For the popularity of “Herakles type” figurines in the Hellenistic East, see discussion in Connelly 1990: 98–99; Invernizzi 1985: 98; Martínez-Sève 2002: 726–28.

¹² This particular popularity of lion-hunting attributes (the club and the lion pelt), as opposed to other features usually associated with Herakles in the Greek world, is also shared in the terracotta figurines at Susa (Martínez-Sève 2002: 704).

tion, the lion pelt was more significant. To a viewer versed in Near Eastern culture, an image of a heroic-looking male nude with a lion's pelt could have provoked comparison with the nude belted hero motif of earlier Mesopotamian art.

Monumental images of lion-hunting men survived into the visual world of Hellenistic Mesopotamia through multiple avenues. While few explicit representations of the nude belted hero would likely have endured, variations on the motif – depicting the king or other heroic figure grappling with lions – were portrayed on Mesopotamian palace walls throughout the first millennium BCE. These included the so-called “Hairy one” relief at the Neo-Assyrian palace at Khorsabad, as well as images of the Assyrian king hunting lions depicted both on palace wall reliefs and seals (Collon 1987: 130). Similar imagery existed in Persia: reliefs of the “Persian Royal Hero” were carved on the doorjambs of Darius's palace at Persepolis; both the Royal Hero and other lion-hunting figures were popular on Achaemenid stamp and cylinder seals (Curtis and Tallis 2005: 92–94; Garrison 2000: 126–51; Collon 1987: 92). Neo-Assyrian palaces may have been completely inaccessible by the Hellenistic period; however, Neo-Assyrian seals have frequently been recovered from later contexts (Collon 1987: 135–39). Additionally, the reliefs at Persepolis, as well as the small scale Achaemenid arts, would still have been accessible as media for the circulation of ideas throughout Mesopotamian society.¹³ Nude, bearded male figurines would present striking visual similarities to these royal images, through the shared upright posture, bearded face, well-muscled mature male body, and lion-hunting attributes.

If the ancient viewer recognized a visual association between the Mesopotamian royal representations and the heroic-looking nude male figurines, s/he could make new meanings through this visual entanglement. Figurines viewed by some people as “Herakles” could have gained additional, or alternate, layers of significance relating to Mesopotamian history, myth, and kingship. Indeed, this association between the nude bearded figurines and the nude belted hero may have been one of the reasons why Mesopotamians felt comfortable engaging with these figurines. Outside the realm of the nude belted hero, and the associated contest scenes and hunting motifs, male nudity was not considered a positive attribute in Mesopotamian art; indeed, it was generally a symbol of humiliation reserved for captives and dead enemies (Asher-Greve 1998: 20). Even when the lion-hunting hero motif is depicted, the first millennium versions are usually not shown completely nude. However, the continuity of such motifs with the earlier Mesopotamian tradition of a specific kind of heroic nudity may have allowed nudity in terracotta figurines of lion-hunting heroes to be less problematic. The concordance of the Greek idea of Herakles with several of the attributes of the Mesopotamian nude belted hero provides one possible explanation as to why the “Herakles” figurines became accepted and popular, whereas depictions

¹³ On the importance of seals as portable media of idea exchange in first millennium BCE Mesopotamia, see Uehlinger 2000: xxv–xxvi.

of other nude males derived from the Greek tradition (such as Apollo or Dionysos) were less prevalent.

In addition to this emphasis on features with potential linkages to heroic representations in Mesopotamian art, an importance also seems to have been placed on the statue-like display quality of figurines such as M14884, B16934, and M15544. As noted above, several of the features of these figurines seem to have been designed or manipulated for the purpose of keeping the figurine in a vertically stable position. Plinths in particular not only add to the vertical stability of figurines by creating a wide base, but also construct a visual divide between the figurine and the surface on which it rests – literally raising the image up and away from the mundane world, as if it were a statue to be viewed from afar rather than an active participant in its surroundings. This is in contrast to most Hellenistic Babylonian figurines, which generally did not have wide bases or other vertically-stable constructions; such figurines would need to be held or propped up in order to be engaged with. Thus the lack of vertical stability in most figurines encouraged tactile interaction, as well as close physical proximity, between human and object that was unnecessary for figurines like M14884, B16934, and M15544. The statue-like qualities of these “nude heroes” enabled a more distant viewing experience, in which the figurines could be looked at and received by an “audience” rather than an “interlocutor.”

It is important to note that the scale of a figurine differs substantially from that of a bronze statue. Statues and figurines would have conditioned very different experiences of human-object interaction. We cannot therefore look to statues to provide the meanings of the figurines – which, indeed, suggests that the Herakles identification of the Seleucia-on-the-Tigris bronze does not automatically condition a similar Herakles identification for figurines. Rather, both the statue and the figurines operated within a space in the Hellenistic Babylonian cultural mindset that was open to the concept of nude, male, bearded, lion-hunting identities. The further association of statue-like qualities with the figurines suggests that both were regarded as objects – or, further, identities – for display.

In analyzing these figurines’ statue-like qualities, it seems significant that they are among the few male figurines from Hellenistic Babylonia shown wearing beards. Prior to the Hellenistic period, beards were considered a sign of mature masculinity and virility in both Greek and Babylonian culture. However, during the Hellenistic period, the artistic depictions of men, including images of the Seleucid kings, shifted to a more youthful ideal.¹⁴ This switch toward portraying kings as young men may be the reason why so few Hellenistic Babylonian male figurines are bearded – indeed, the majority are beardless. So if the ideal was youth and beardlessness, why

¹⁴ This shift is due largely to the successes Alexander accomplished at a very young age (coupled with the fact that, due to his premature death, he never aged into a mature man). Alexander’s youthful portraits had a strong influence on shaping the image of the ideal Hellenistic king, and many of the Hellenistic kings who succeeded Alexander imitated him (Stewart 1993: 75).

would the Hellenistic Babylonians portray the less fashionable, bearded, male maturity in statuesque figurine form? One might understand the reification of bearded, male maturity into statue form as part of a process of distancing the former bearded male ideal from usefulness in contemporary society. Bearded ancient Mesopotamian kings or bearded Classical Greek scholars were admired, but also remade as larger-than-life heroes that were remote, unreachable, and with whom it was difficult to self-identify. This visual impression would have been further reinforced by the use of statuesque qualities – such as the raised positioning provided by the plinth – common to such figurines. Such features set the figurines apart from their human viewers, who were not required to engage with the objects in a physical or tactile manner.

To return to the consideration of M14884, B16934, and M15544 specifically, these figurines would appear to be not just *hybrid*, but more specifically *hybrid with a purpose* – a deliberate combination of features designed to negotiate the sensitivities and visual traditions of multiple cultures in order to be as broadly appealing as possible. This hybridity is even further extended and elaborated in other groups of entangled figurines, with thickly entwined meldings of Greek and Babylonian motifs, forms, and techniques. However, even in these so-called “Herakles” figurines – figurines which at first glance seem to suggest a display of ethnic difference – cross-cultural exchanges of form were cultivated, as well as the ambiguity of representation that allowed for the kinds of multiple interpretations that could transcend cultural differences. Less ambiguous, and perhaps more specific, were the ways in which these figurines defined gender and age identity – relegating bearded mature males to a statuesque role as revered, but inactive, relics of now-defunct political systems.

Conclusion

Through an investigation of these trends and entanglements, figurines as an art corpus contribute greatly to our understanding of Hellenistic Babylonian identities. Most significantly, the trendiest figurines were often those that negotiated a common ground by speaking to both Greek and Babylonian cultural traditions. Such figurines combined techniques, motifs, and visualizations into hybrid, multicultural creations that had the potential to be acceptable and appealing to people of differing cultural backgrounds. In keeping with this preference, there also seems to have been a general avoidance of elements that were exclusive to only one cultural tradition. Thus, I argue that terracotta figurines were not only active participants in the negotiation of ethnic identities, but could also facilitate social interactions and personal identity creation in which the importance of ethnic affiliation was minimized.

Based on this evidence, I seek to open a broader perspective on Hellenistic Babylonian social identity. Ethnic identification of individuals as either “Greek” or

“Babylonian” may not have been the singular – or even the primary – way in which Hellenistic Babylonian society organized itself. Instead, we should consider that other kinds of social identity – such as age, gender, status – may have held importance in Hellenistic Babylonian society. The lack of a singular focus on ethnic division allowed other social identities to exist in dialogue with cross-cultural concerns, as part of a larger network of social relations. A broader consideration of these Hellenistic Babylonian social identities is beyond the scope of this paper; however, my research has laid the groundwork for such future investigations.

This is not to suggest that scholars should not continue to research the issue of cross-cultural interaction in Hellenistic Babylonia; in fact, quite the opposite. This article has shown that evidence for cross-cultural interactions, when approached in a more subtle and nuanced way, can reveal previously unknown layers of complex inter-cultural negotiation and purposeful hybridities. However, even as we contemplate such rich prospects for probing the Greek-Babylonian relationship, we should be mindful that cross-cultural interactions did not take place in a vacuum and may even have taken, at times, a subordinate position to other identity concerns.

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Mark B. Garrison

The Impressed Image: Glyptic Studies as Art and Social History

Abstract: The Persepolis Fortification archive, dated to 509–493 BCE, that is, the reign of Darius I (521–486 BCE), contains an enormous wealth of visual imagery in the form of seal impressions. Because of its archival context, the glyptic imagery from the Fortification archive exists within a complex network of social and administrative relations between hundreds of individuals mentioned by name, office, and/or title; these individuals range in rank/status from slaves to the Great King. This administrative apparatus, discernable through personal names, place names, offices, titles, etc., adds considerable value/depth to the glyptic imagery. A question naturally arises as to whether there are patterns in the visual imagery that correspond to socio-administrative hierarchies within this network of human relations. An analysis of a small selection of texts and seals from the archive indicates that in some cases glyptic images did convey meaning in terms of socio-administrative relations. Indeed, it is suggested here that certain patterns in glyptic imagery involving seal users of considerable authority within the Fortification archive reveal a complex sharpening of socio-administrative hierarchies among the elite at Persepolis in the last decade of the 6th century BCE.

Keywords: Assyria, Achaemenid Persia, Persepolis, Persepolis Fortification archive, empire, ethnicity, visual culture, display, culture, imperialism, reliefs, group identities

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Introduction

An art history of ancient Western Asia is a challenging endeavor. The amount of visual imagery that survives is, in comparison to what existed originally, very small and unevenly distributed in time and space. That imagery is, moreover, often compromised by lack of secure provenance or, when provenanced, comes from secondary or tertiary deposits divorced from the original functional contexts. Dating visual imagery with any great precision (say, to a particular year) is usually not possible; generally we can do no better than the reign of a particular ruler or, even, a century within a particular cultural milieu. Under these conditions, attempting anything more than a description of compositional, iconographic, and stylistic

features of the art of a particular time and place, or a matching of these features with information that can be ferreted from the rich literary tradition from select periods, is difficult.¹

A close reading of the contextual situations in which images were created and consumed lies at the heart of most art historical investigations. Given the fragmented and diffuse surviving visual record from ancient Western Asia, pursuing such contextual analyses is often challenging. What we may call a depth of visual evidence in ancient Western Asia, that is, an intense concentration of imagery at a particular time and in a particular place, is rare. A few noteworthy exceptions include a handful of funerary deposits, for example, the Royal Cemetery at Ur; monumental relief from some royal palaces, such as the Assyrian palaces at Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh; and the rare site-wide destruction horizon, as at Hasanlu IVB in north-western Iran.² There exists, however, a distinctive artifact of ancient Western Asia, the engraved seal, that offers, in some settings, a potentially rich field in which to explore the socio-political dynamics of visual imagery. The discussion that follows pursues some potential research avenues within the framework of glyptic imagery preserved in a large administrative archive from Persepolis, the Persepolis Fortification archive.

The Persepolis Fortification Archive

The Persepolis Fortification archive was excavated in 1933 in two chambers of the northern fortification wall at Persepolis (hence its name) (Map 2; letter Ⓐ in Fig. 1). The archive concerns a state agency that managed, in a region centered on Persepolis, the collection, storage, taxation, and disbursement of locally-produced commodities (cereals, wine, beer, oil, honey, fruit, poultry, livestock) that were subsequently distributed as subsistence rations or “salary” to members of the royal family, the imperial elite, administrative officials, religious officials (and deities), travellers on the royal roads, agricultural workers, craftsmen, and livestock.³ The archive is dated

1 The traditional strength of art historical analyses for ancient Western Asia has been in formal studies of iconography, principally attempting to match imagery with surviving literary and mythological narratives, and, to a lesser degree, in formal studies of style, understanding workshop traditions and affiliations.

2 For recent analyses of the royal tombs of Ur, see Pollock 1991, 2007a and b; Sürenhagen 2002; Cohen 2005. For Assyrian palace reliefs see (the following articles from 2004 are from a *Rencontre* concerning the site of Nineveh): Ataç 2004; Ornan 2004; Bonatz 2004; Watanabe 2004; Bahrani 2004; Dolce 2004; Ataç 2010. Of the many studies devoted to Hasanlu IVB, I highlight here only the excellent analysis of the glyptic from the site, Marcus 1996.

3 For introductions and/or surveys of the Fortification archive, see: Hallock 1969: 1–69; 1977, 1978, and 1985; Hinz 1970, 1971; Lewis 1977: 4–14; 1984: 592–602; 1990, 1994; Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989: 90–237; Koch 1990, 1992: 25–67; Wiesehöfer 2001: 66–79, 268–70; Garrison and Root 2001: 1–60; Briant

by date formulae in the Elamite and Aramaic documents to the middle years of the reign of Darius I, 509–493 BCE.⁴

The Fortification archive is very large. While there exists still today no full inventory of the clay documents that constitute the archive, a recent estimate, based upon a period of intense study of the edited and unedited material in Chicago, puts the surviving archive at “about 20,000–25,000 tablets and fragments representing about 15,000–18,000 original documents.”⁵ It is important to recognize, however, that the surviving documents are only a fragment, and probably a very small fragment, of the original archive.⁶

There are three categories of clay documents in the archive: tablets carrying texts written in cuneiform script in the Elamite language (the most common type of document in the archive), generally sealed; tablets carrying texts written in Aramaic script and language, almost always sealed; and uninscribed but sealed tablets.⁷

The Elamite documents name approximately 150 places in the region under the administrative purview of the Fortification archive (Fig. 2). The settled places include towns, villages, estates of the elite, “paradises,” way-stations along the royal road, storehouses, fortresses, and treasuries. Only a few of these places can be collated with known sites, the most prominent being Persepolis (*Parša*), Pasargadae (*Batrakataš*), Šīrāz (*Tīrazziš*), and Nīrīz (probably *Narezzaš*).

2002: 422–48, 938–43; Kuhrt 2007: 763–814 (select texts with commentary); Henkelman 2008a: 65–179; Briant, Henkelman, and Stolper 2008; Azzoni et al., in press; Garrison, in press b. There are in addition a substantial number of studies devoted to specialized topics on the archive; see Henkelman 2008a: 67, n. 153 for a sample of the scholarly literature.

4 There is a second, and much smaller, archive from Persepolis, the Persepolis Treasury archive, dated to the years 492–457 BCE. The Treasury archive documents (partial) payments of silver in lieu of, or in addition to, food rations (Cameron 1948, 1958, 1965; Arfaee 2008a; Jones and Yie 2011). The two archives share multiple features, including some document types and tablet formats; a handful of officials and seals occur in both the Fortification and Treasury archives (Garrison, in press b). Henkelman (in press) suggests that the Treasury archive is a “branch of administration parallel, or perhaps subordinated,” to that documented by the Fortification archive.

5 Jones and Stolper 2008: 37–44; Azzoni et al., in press. A large percentage of the archive is on long-term study-loan at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Many tablets are also in Tehran, and a few have appeared on the art market (see Razmjou 2004; Henkelman 2008a: 75–79; Azzoni et al., in press).

6 Henkelman (2008a: 79, 177–79) estimates that there may have been 100,000 or more tablets in the original archive covering the years 509–493 BCE; thus, the edited sample may represent only some 5% of the original archive.

7 There are also four unique texts in the archive, one each in Greek, Babylonian (probably extraneous to the archive), Phrygian, and Old Persian (see Stolper and Tavernier 2007: 3–4 and 23–25, with previous bibliography). There is also a handful of sealed clay bag or box closures.

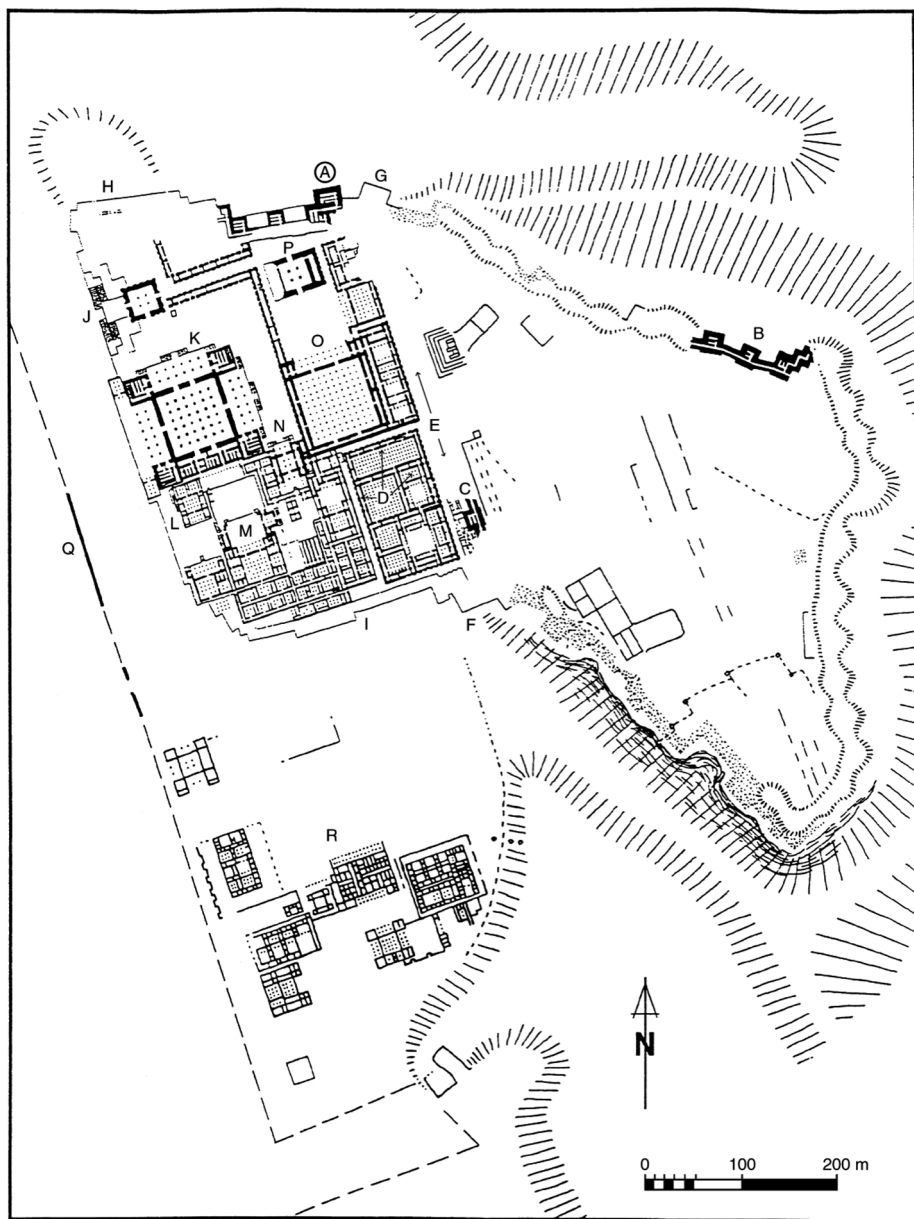


Figure 1: Plan of Persepolis. Courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago.

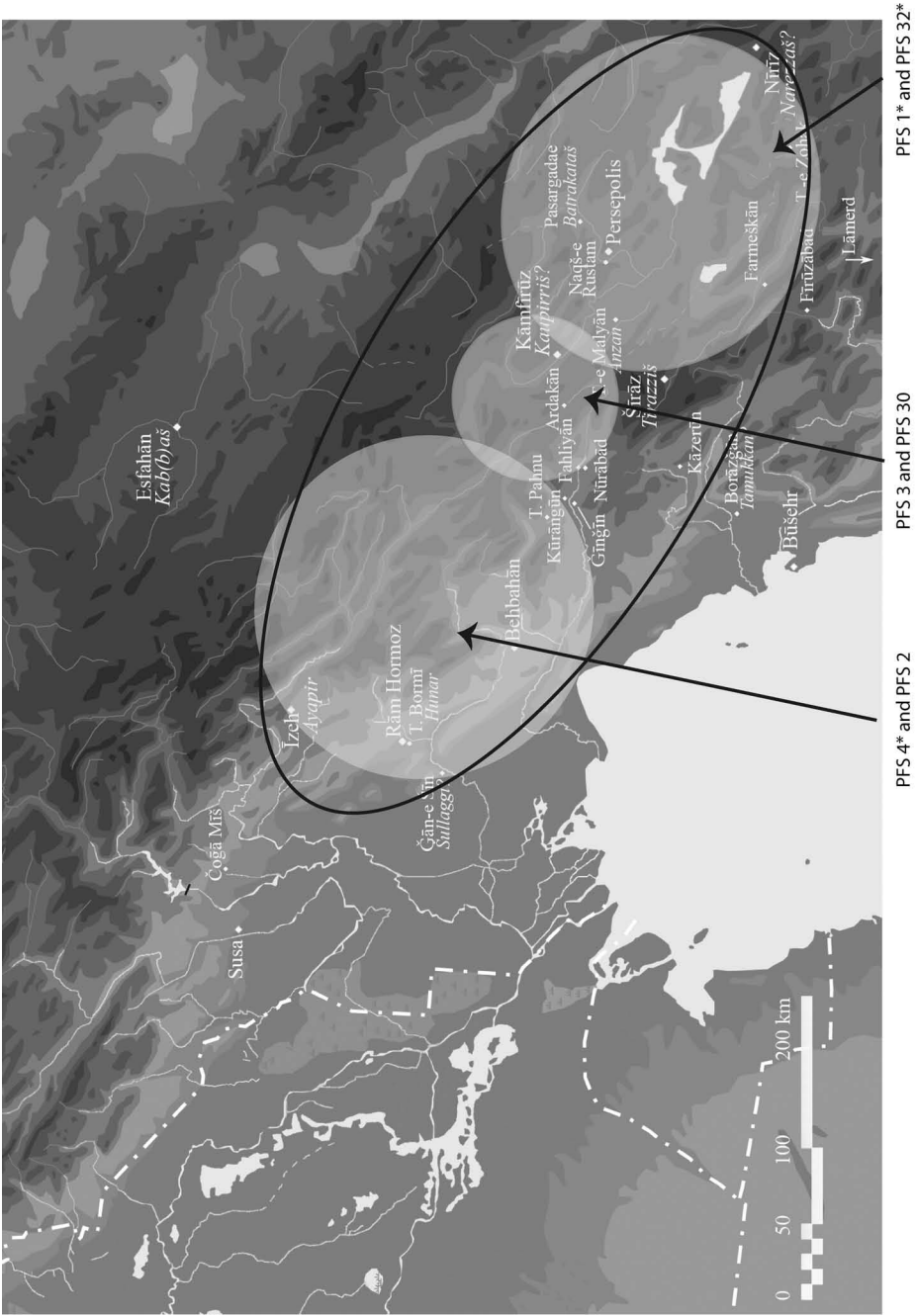


Figure 2: Administrative zones in the Persepolis Fortification archive.
Courtesy Wouter F.M. Henkelman.

The territory administered by the archive lay predominantly in what is today the province of Fārs (Fig. 2). The exact geographic range of the agency is unclear; debate has centered especially upon its northern and northwestern extent. Susa figures prominently in the Elamite texts, but generally as a point of destination or departure; most commentators do not think that the jurisdiction of the agency extended all the way to Susa, or even into the eastern part of what is today Khūzestān. The modern Rām Hormoz plain may mark the westernmost extent of the system, in which case we are dealing only with the highlands of pre-Achaemenid Elam, not the lowland floodplains of the Susiana.⁸ Prominent features in the administrative landscape of the Fortification archive were segments of the famous royal road.⁹ From Persepolis the main trunk(s) of that road ran to the west to Sardis and to the east into Bactria and India. There were approximately twenty post-stations along the royal road(s) in the region administered by the Fortification archive.¹⁰

There are at least three administrative regions within the system, defined by seal usage, each headed by an individual whom we designate the regional director (Fig. 2).¹¹ These regional directors are principally responsible for determining ration allocations for workers. We know the names of these directors only for the Persepolis region and the Fahliyān region. For the former there are two individuals, Karkiš (in years 15–19) and Šuddayauda (in years 20–26); for the latter there is one, Iršena, who may have been assisted by Irtuppiya. All four officials are known only from the Fortification archive.¹²

The director of the agency represented by the Fortification archive is Parnaka (OP **Farnaka*-). He has often been identified as a member of the royal family, perhaps

8 See Henkelman (2008a: 110–17) for an excellent discussion of the issues surrounding the territorial extent of the Fortification archive. Henkelman (in press) states that in size the territory administered by the Persepolis Fortification archive was approximately the same as modern Switzerland. The analogy is operative at the topographic level as well in that the Persepolis agency was deeply entrenched institutionally in the lower valleys and intermontane plains, but not so at “higher altitudes, especially fit for summer pasture... though contacts and exchanges with, presumably, (agro-)pastoralist groups are implied” (Henkelman, in press).

9 The memoranda concerning travel rations dispensed along the royal road(s), Hallock’s (1969) text category Q, constitute the most numerous type of transaction recorded in the Fortification archive.

10 The Achaemenid royal road is much discussed; with regard to the Fortification archive, see, for example, Koch 1986, 1990; Vallat 1993; Graf 1994; Giovinazzo 1994; Briant 2002: 357–59, 365–68, 927; Arfaee 2008b, 1999; Potts 2008; Henkelman 2008a: 113–15; 2008b.

11 The exact number of administrative regions, and their boundaries, are much debated. The three regions that are relatively well defined via office seals are Persepolis (PFS 1*), Kāmfirūz (the pair of seals PFS 3 and PFS 30) and Fahliyān (PFS 4*, perhaps also PFS 2). On the administrative regions of the Fortification archive, see Hallock 1977, 1985; Koch 1990; Garrison and Root 2001: 272–74 (PFS 1*, Cat.No. 182), 411–13 (PFS 4*, Cat.No. 292); Henkelman 2008a: 118–20, 128–29; Garrison, in press b.

12 For other high-rank administrators in the Fortification archive, see the discussion below.

even the uncle of Darius.¹³ He bears no title in the texts from the Fortification archive; his authority is, however, wide-ranging, including oversight of the royal domain (see Briant 2002: 469–71; Henkelman 2010a: 733–34; Henkelman, in press). He has an impressively large administrative staff that accompanies him as he travels around the region.¹⁴ The deputy-director is Ziššawiš (Old Iranian *Čiçavahuš), an individual otherwise unknown in other sources.¹⁵ He appears to possess a similar range of administrative jurisdiction as Parnaka. Below the director, the deputy-director, and the regional directors are a cluster of administrators whose exact hierarchies are not always indicated.¹⁶

Almost 3100 distinct seals have been identified to date on the documents from the Fortification archive.¹⁷ This is a remarkable phenomenon, the sheer scale of which is almost unmatched for any corpus of visual imagery from the ancient world. These images are, moreover, linked to texts that often name the users of these seals (officials and offices) and provide (sometimes detailed) insights into the administrative responsibilities of those seal users.¹⁸ The tablets are provenanced, relatively well excavated, come from an imperial capital, and are precisely dated both as an archive and in many cases as individual transactions. The milieu in which the seals functioned, namely, a heartland capital at the most critical, formative period of the most important ruler of the Achaemenid imperial phenomenon, is a particularly charged one.

The seals on the Fortification archive thus exist within a complex network of social and administrative relations between hundreds of individuals mentioned by name, office, and/or title; those individuals range in rank/status from slaves to the Great King. This administrative apparatus, via personal names, place names, offices, titles, etc., adds considerable value/depth to the glyptic imagery.

13 Based upon Herodotus VII.66.2 and VIII.126.1 and the patronym on his seal, PFS 16* (see below) (e.g., Hallock 1985: 591–92; Lewis 1977: 7–9); cf., however, the remarks of Henkelman 2010a: 733. Parnaka appears to have left his office sometime in 497/96 BCE. His successors are difficult to identify with certainty, but appear to have included Irdumartiya (OP Artavardiya) and Ašbazana (OP Aspačanā, Greek Aspathines), on whom see the comments below. For Parnaka's successors, see Koch 1990: 218–35; Koch 1993: 62–63; Hinz 1971: 302–308; Hallock 1985: 590; Henkelman 2008b: 127, n. 283; Henkelman, in press.

14 Henkelman (in press) makes the case for Parnaka being the satrap of *Parša*, or holding an office that was equal in rank. On Parnaka's staff, see the comments of Briant 2002: 468, 510–11; Henkelman 2003: 134–35; Henkelman, in press.

15 There is a Ziššawiš in the Treasury archive, a high-rank official who issues letter-orders, but the linkage with the Ziššawiš in the Fortification archive is unlikely (see the comments of Garrison, in press b).

16 See also the discussion below.

17 Many thousands of texts remain unstudied and many thousands of fragments of tablets remain in storage. I estimate that the total number of distinct and legible seals that will eventually be documented (on the tablets selected for study) will be approximately 3400–3600.

18 A select handful of the seals belong to users who are known to us from the Classical written sources and Achaemenid imperial inscriptions (see, the comments below, and, e.g., Azzoni et al., in press).

Each individual seal within the archive is also part of another network, a visual network consisting of thousands of images circulating in the environs of Persepolis. This visual network is defined internally by relationships of style, composition, and iconography among seals within the archive. In many cases, these visual relationships are so strong that it is most certain that we are dealing with the products of individual artisans or workshops. This visual network, and the artisans working within it, are also defined externally by relationships of style, composition, and iconography to older visual traditions in Elam, Babylonia, and Assyria. In this sense Persepolitan glyptic represents the final, grand summation of the glyptic arts of ancient Western Asia.

In addition to the sheer scale of the visual phenomenon and the rich archival network in which it is embedded, Persepolitan glyptic is distinguished by the complexity of its imagery; indeed, the richness and density of this imagery are without parallel in the surviving glyptic/sculptural corpora from ancient Western Asia.

Avenues of Research, Persepolitan Glyptic

Such a large number of images concentrated at a specific moment in time and place, as we have in Persepolis, constitutes a truly remarkable resource in which to pursue myriad issues surrounding traditional concerns of art history: theme, composition, iconography, and style.¹⁹ This is especially so owing to the wide range of thematic content and stylistic execution reflected in the glyptic imagery from the archive. Given the often considerably large numbers of seals and officials that are involved, and given the complexity of the textual record, sealing protocols, and the visual imagery itself, one cannot in this venue hope to survey comprehensively either the multiple avenues of research that are possible or the full range of the imagery that is preserved.

Traditional approaches to Persepolitan imagery *qua* imagery have already produced significant modifications to our understanding of the early, developmental phases of Achaemenid art.²⁰ The glyptic from the archive has provided especially interesting insights into the early, formative phases of “Achaemenid art” and its affinities to earlier carving traditions in Elam, Assyria, and Babylonia, topics about which previously very little could be said. A series of remarkable “heirloom” seals have been the conceptual nexus for many of these discussions, particularly PFS 93* (Figs. 3–4) and PFS 51 (Fig. 5). The former represents an office associated with cattle ‘dispensed before the king’ and carries an oft-discussed Elamite inscription: ‘Kuraš the Anzanite (or of Anzan), son of Šešpeš (Teispes).’ The latter is the personal seal of

¹⁹ Cf. the remark of Briant (2002: 423), “the entire documentation [of the Fortification archive] is extraordinarily concentrated in time and space.”

²⁰ For a sample of some of the literature, see the discussion in Garrison, in press b.

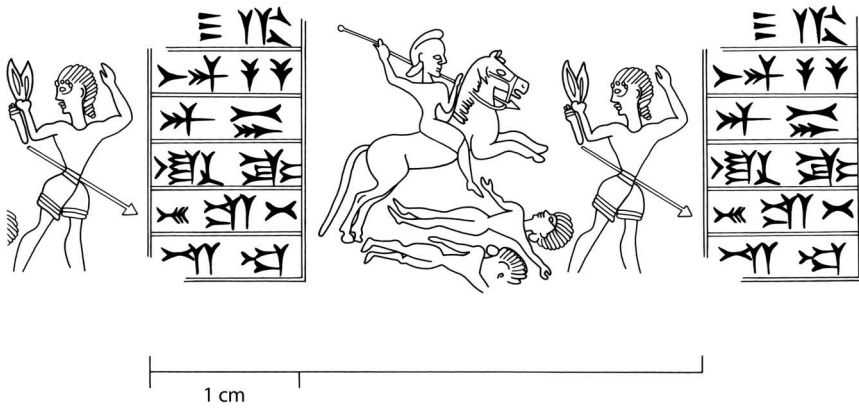


Figure 3: Collated line drawing of PFS 93* (scale 2:1).



Figure 4: Impression of PFS 93* on PF 692 (reverse) (scale 2:1). Courtesy of the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project.

the royal woman Irdabama, the most conspicuous and active member of the royal family in the Fortification archive outside of the king himself. The seals, whose compositional dynamics and style are so similar that they surely must come from the same workshop, bear directly on wide-ranging discussions of chronology, genealogy,

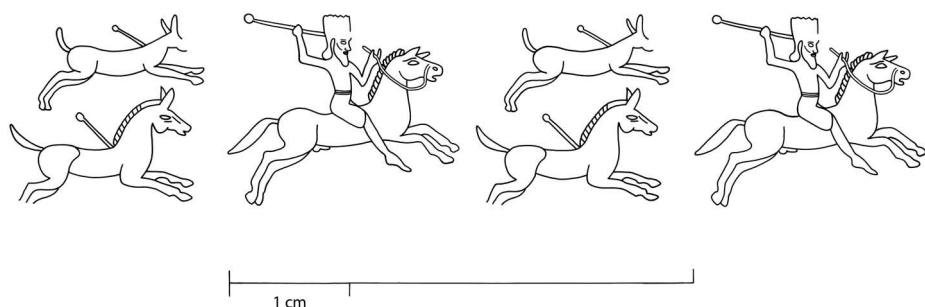


Figure 5: Collated line drawing of PFS 51 (scale 1.6:1).

history, and social identity connected with the peoples and ruling elite of the Khūzestān lowlands, the Susianna, and the highlands of eastern Khūzestān and Fārs, Anšan, in the pre-Achaemenid period. The seals also provide invaluable insights into the conceptual origins of early Achaemenid glyptic and, owing to their probable original locus in the highlands of Elam, the socio-political tensions at play between the political rhetoric of the Teispid royal house, associated with Cyrus the Great, and that of the emergent Achaemenid, associated with Darius I.²¹

The ability to tie glyptic imagery with specific people, places, and administrative functions is a particularly interesting dimension of the Persepolitan phenomenon. The “relatedness” of the imagery via its particular association with a specific time, space, and human collective is one of the principal manners in which the glyptic from this archive distinguishes itself from other classes of surviving imagery, even monumental wall reliefs from the Assyrian palaces, which are analogous to Persepolitan glyptic in respect to the large amount of imagery that survives.

The administrative apparatus represented in the Fortification archive can itself provide frameworks for interpretive analyses. In the archive there are distinct categories of officials demarked by the types of things that they do, the administrative contexts in which they appear, the nature and amount of commodities that they receive as ration payments, and/or, in some cases, the titles that they bear. A question then naturally arises as to whether there are patterns in the visual imagery used by officials linked by such administrative factors. Some years ago now this approach was employed on a group of seals occurring on a very specific type of transaction involving commodities ‘dispensed/consumed before the king’ (Garrison 1991). One may, of course, reverse this process, working from seals with closely related imagery back to individuals and offices to determine whether certain features of composition, iconography, and/or style are indicative of specific rank and/or

²¹ The seals, and the scholarship associated with them, are treated in some detail in Garrison 2011b. See also the comments of Henkelman 2011: 601–603; Waters 2011: 288–93.

status.²² Another tack is to examine the seals used by specific individuals of known administrative/social positions through time in order to determine whether there is a correlation between administrative/social position and imagery; for example, in several instances prominent individuals in the archive replace one seal with another (see, for example, Garrison 1991, 1998, 2007, in press b).

Socio-Administrative Hierarchies at Persepolis: Texts and Seals

Within the Elamite documents from the Fortification archive there are several metrics for determining socio-administrative hierarchies.²³ One of the most direct is a special type of ration allocation (Hallock's H texts, "receipts by officials") that appears to be a "salary" rather than simply a regular subsistence ration (Hallock 1969: 23–24).²⁴ These texts indicate that different individuals received different amounts and kinds of ration allocations; the payments thus appear to differentiate individuals through scales of ration payments, reflecting what appears to be some type of socio-administrative hierarchy. These texts are, however, relatively few in number, concern less than twenty individuals, and are limited to individuals of high administrative rank and/or social status: for example, Parnaka, Ziššawiš, Ašbazana, Kambarma [OP Gaubaruva, Greek Gobryas], several satraps, etc. (see Hallock 1969: 23–24; Aperghis 1999: 164). In many cases, one of the seals applied to the H texts belongs to the individual receiving the rations.²⁵ Despite the limited number of individuals involved, these texts, and the seals applied to them, constitute a critical

22 See, for example, Garrison 2001; Garrison and Ritner 2010; Garrison, in press a. It is important to note that there are two functional categories of seals within the archive, personal seals and office seals, the former representing an individual, the latter representing an institutional authority. Determining whether a seal is a personal seal or an office seal is not always possible; indeed, in some cases such a distinction may not have even existed.

23 The discussion that follows is a very reductive overview of a complex set of textual information concerning ration allocation within the archive. There are several categories of texts wherein individuals receive rations; it is not always transparent (as in the H texts to be discussed) that these ration allocations are for the single individual named rather than for the individual and/or unspecified work groups. Aperghis 1999 is an attempt to establish administrative hierarchies based upon ration allocations.

24 Hallock 1969 divided the Elamite documents into thirty-two text categories (A–W, with subdivisions).

25 Sealing protocols within the Fortification archive are dictated by a variety of factors; for a general introduction, see Henkelman 2008a: 129–35; Garrison 2008: 158–69; Garrison, in press b. The H texts are one category of transaction whose sealing protocols require further study. It appears that on H-text transactions sealed with only one seal, that seal more often than not belongs to the receiver. On those H-text transactions sealed with two seals, attribution is less clear. The seal on the left edge often

resource for determining socio-administrative hierarchies at the very top of the administrative system represented by the Fortification archive.

A few individuals in the Fortification archive can be associated with persons named in the Achaemenid royal inscriptions and/or the Classical sources. The most well-known are the king himself, Kambarma, Ašbazana, Irdumartiya, Udusana (Greek Atossa), Irtašduna (Greek Artystone), Iršama (OP Aršāma) and, probably, Parnaka (see, for example, Lewis 1977: 3–26). Here, again, we are dealing with a very limited number of individuals. These sources provide, however, valuable social and political background on these individuals, sometimes documenting their exalted status at court, information that generally is lacking in the texts from the Fortification archive. These sources document, for instance, Kambarma's link to the royal family by marriage, and, in the case of Kambarma, and perhaps also Ašbazana, their roles in the regicide of 522 BCE. Remarkably, of this particular exalted group (Kambarma, Ašbazana, Irdumartiya, Udusana, Irtašduna, Iršama, and Parnaka), the Fortification archive contains the personal seals for all except the queen Udusana.

Some administrative functions in the Fortification archive clearly are done only by individuals wielding high-order authority. We have already noted the directors of the three administrative regions, Persepolis, Kāmfirūz, and Fahliyān, who have wide-ranging authority in determining ration allocations for work-groups under their jurisdictions. The offices themselves are represented by office seals, PFS 1* for the Persepolis region, PFS 3 and PFS 30 for Kāmfirūz region, and PFS 4* for Fahliyān region. These seals, with the exception of three animal ration texts involving PFS 3, always occur alone on documents, indicating that no other authority is needed to secure the transaction. Additionally, there are clusters of other seals associated with each of the named directors, that is, Karkiš, Šuddayauda, and Iršena, seals that may be personal seals, represent other types of institutional authority that they held, belong to/represent members of their staffs, etc.²⁶

Karkiš and Šuddayauda in particular have intriguing dossiers. A handful of texts designate them *kapnuškira*, 'treasurer.'²⁷ Henkelman (in press) has recently suggested that these individuals essentially held the same office as the 'treasurer at Parša' who figures so prominently in the Treasury archive.²⁸ Karkiš and Šuddayauda additionally are designated *kurdabattiš*, 'chief of workers' (*kurtas*). We do not know the full authority or jurisdiction that this title implies, but only a select few other

belongs to the supply official/office, but the other seal may in some cases represent an agent/representative for the receiver rather than the receiver himself.

²⁶ The seals surrounding the three named regional directors are addressed briefly in Garrison, in press b; the topic needs a more thorough study.

²⁷ NN 1069, 1411, 1724, and 2079.

²⁸ In other instances in the Treasury archive, the 'treasurer in the fortress.' See also Koch (1981, 1990: 235–46), who suggested the same; Briant 2002: 428–29, 940, with bibliography.

individuals are so designated.²⁹ Although the number of texts are small, Karkiš and Šuddayauda are never designated *kurdabattiš* during the periods when they seal under the institutional authority represented by the regional seal PFS 1*, whereas all instances where they are designated *kapnuškira*, ‘treasurer,’ occur during their time as regional directors under PFS 1*.³⁰ Finally, before and while he uses PFS 1* as regional director, Šuddayauda also uses his personal seal, PFS 32*, to ratify transactions.³¹ In almost half of the cases where he uses PFS 32*, a second seal is applied to the tablet, indicating that, when using PFS 32*, Šuddayauda is not acting as the regional director, but simply as the oversight official for work groups under his personal direction.³²

Two of the highest-authority functions in the Fortification archive involve the issuance of a letter-order (Hallock’s T texts) and *halmi*, ‘a sealed document.’³³ There are only approximately 35 individuals (legible names) who issue letter-orders; Parnaka and his deputy, Ziššawiš, account for the majority of the surviving letter-orders. Letters addressed by Parnaka, Ziššawiš, Irdumartiya, and Ašbazana are distinguished by the inclusion of colophons.³⁴ Sealing protocols dictate that letter-orders bear only the seal of the addressor; we thus are in the fortunate position of having the seal imagery for this complete group of administrators.

The term *halmi* occurs most often in the travel rations, but is also deployed in other text types. Named individuals (legible) who issue a *halmi* number just under 100; Parnaka, Ziššawiš, and the king account for the great majority of issuances. The considerably larger number of individuals who issue a *halmi* (in comparison to those named in the “salary” payments and those issuing letter-orders) suggests that in some cases we may be reaching a little farther down the administrative hierarchy, but

29 Bakadada, Iršena (the other named regional director), Mišparma, and (once) the pair Datukka and Zimakka. Zimakka, alone, is so named in one text (NN 1847). On the office *kurdabattiš*, see Aperghis 1999: 184; Henkelman 2008a: 129; Briant 2002: 426–28; Henkelman, in press; Garrison, in press b.

30 Henkelman (in press) discusses in more detail the titles associated with Karkiš and Šuddayauda.

31 PFS 32* carries an Elamite inscription, ‘Šuddayauda, son of Haturdada,’ thus clearly indicating that it is his personal seal (Garrison and Root 2001: 268–70 [Cat. No. 180]). On inscribed seals within the archive, see Garrison 2006; Garrison, in press b.

32 See also the discussion below concerning *šaramanna* and *damanna* officials. It is interesting to note that PFS 32* seals six different types of transactions, whereas Šuddayauda and PFS 1* seal only three types of transactions all of which are closely related and concern rationing of work groups: L1 texts (“regular monthly rations with *gal makip*”), L2 texts (“regular monthly rations with *galma*”), and M texts (“special rations”).

33 It seems clear that letter-orders were considered a type of *halmi*; it is not uncommon for the colophon of a letter-order to include the phrase *halmi hi lika*, “this *halmi* was delivered.” On the two document types, see Hallock 1969: 53 and 1978: 113; Henkelman 2008a: 104–107, 133–34, 143–46; Jones and Stolper 2008: 32; Garrison, in press b.

34 Hallock (1969: 51) noted that colophons also occur on the “salary” payments (H texts) for Parnaka, Ziššawiš, and Irdumartiya. Colophons also occur in a small smattering of other text categories (see Tavernier 2008: 65).

probably not by much. Generally, individuals who are named issuing a *halmi* (as distinct from letter-orders) do not apply their seals to tablets. In numerous cases, however, the seals of these *halmi*-issuers are preserved in other contexts within the archive.

Two important terms merit mention. Work groups often are qualified as PN *šarama(nna)* and/or PN *dama(nna)*. The exact grammatical and semantic parameters of *šarama(nna)* and *dama(nna)* are unclear (see Henkelman 2008a: 128, n. 285; Henkelman, in press; Garrison, in press b). Basically, the terms signify that the individuals so characterized have authority to set ration amounts for the work forces and animals under their jurisdiction and to draw allocations from supply depots (perhaps something like a supervisor). Hallock translated the terms as “whose apportionments are set by PN” (*šaramanna*) and “assigned by PN” (*damanna*).

Many individuals, including Parnaka, Ziššawiš, and the named regional directors, are qualified as *šaramanna* and/or *damanna*, approximately 150 as *šaramanna* and approximately 40 as *damanna*.³⁵ I have found it useful to conceptualize these terms as representing “offices,” thus a *šaramanna* official, but it is important to recognize that the texts do not so designate such a phenomenon. A handful of these officials also issue letter-orders and/or a *halmi*, but most of them do not, suggesting that we may be moving down the administrative hierarchy in the case of many of these *šaramanna/damanna* officials. Caution is warranted; it is clear that a wide range of authority is encompassed by the terms *šaramanna* and *damanna*; not all *šaramanna* and *damanna* officials are equal.

There is a goodly number of titles and descriptive terms that clearly denote administrative rank associated with personnel at local supply depots, but we are not always able to infer the exact meanings of, and functions implied by, these terms or the relative ranks.³⁶ None of the individuals named in these offices can be clearly linked to known

35 This estimate of the number of individuals is based upon the current state of research on the archive, and accounts only for distinct names (not broken readings). This count does not attempt to distinguish possible homophony.

36 Aperghis 1999 discusses many of these terms. There is often at the end of journals and accounts a summary and a colophon that includes the local district in which the transactions took place and may name also some of the following officials by title: the *kurman*, the *šaramanna*, the *ullira* (‘delivery man’), the *haturmakša* (?), the *tumara* (‘grain handler?’) and the *etira*. Other titles that occur in the journals and accounts include *hamišiya* (‘fruit handler’), *ukbahamišiya* (‘assistant fruit handler’), ^{GIŠ}GEŠTIN^{MEŠ} *kutira* (‘wine carrier’), *apparnabara* (?), *amparabaraš* (‘storekeeper’), etc. The proposed translations are those of Hallock (1969: 57–58). Some of these titles also occur in a handful of other text types, particularly the C2 texts (“accounting balances”), the J texts (“royal provisions”), and the K2 texts (“regular monthly rations for named persons qualified in some way”), the first of which are a type of accounting in the field. The exact translations and functions encompassed by the titles are debated, but the offices seem clearly concerned with commodity supply at storehouses. See also Hallock 1969: 58; Koch 1977: 153, 159–64; Briant 2002: 424, 428; Henkelman 2008a: 208–209, 235–36, 247, and 249, esp. 235, n. 516.

šaramanna or damanna officials, halmi-issuers, etc.³⁷ One infers, thus, that these offices at the local supply depots are staffed by individuals well below the level of the šaramanna and damanna officials.

Sealing protocols within the archive provide some insights into administrative hierarchies.³⁸ It is now widely recognized that officials of high rank in many contexts never need a counter-seal, following what we have called the single-seal protocol. There are, however, an exceptionally large number of tablets that carry only one seal in the archive, well over one-half of the sealed tablets. Without repeated occurrences of a seal, we are unable to make the simple inference that single-seal protocol = high-rank user. So, too, there are cases of high status/rank seal users who do not follow the single-seal protocol, Kambarma and Šuddayauda (when using his personal seal PFS 32*) perhaps being the most prominent.³⁹

Through the combined data provided by texts and glyptic praxis in the Fortification archive, the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, and the Classical sources, a fairly detailed picture emerges concerning some aspects of socio-administrative hierarchies at Persepolis in the late 6th century BCE. We are at the stage where we may begin to speak of levels of administrative rank among what, under normal conditions, one would broadly characterize as simply the “elite.” For the moment, the resolution is still fairly low, but becoming sharper as certain categories of administrators and their seals are analyzed.

When one examines the glyptic imagery and styles employed by the groups at the upper levels of the administrative structure, clear patterns emerge. These patterns correlate with socio-administrative hierarchies that we are able to determine through the texts, and in some cases through sources external to the archive. Glyptic imagery at Persepolis thus appears to be an important medium of signification. If these correlations between imagery and socio-administrative status/rank are accurate, it means also that what we could call the “glyptic profiles” of these groups may themselves become accurate metrics for establishing socio-administrative hierarchies among seal users for whom we are less well informed in the texts.⁴⁰

37 There are approximately 65 named (legible) *tumara* officials; the named *ullira*, *etira* and *haturmakša* officials are roughly equal in number, approximately 40–45 for each. Of these four offices, it seems noteworthy that 1) there is almost no overlap in names, and 2) only a handful of names occurs in more than one text.

38 The topic is quite complex; see the discussions in Henkelman 2008a: 129–34; Garrison 2008, in press b.

39 For the case of Kambarma, see Henkelman, in press; Garrison, in press b; for Šuddayauda and PFS 32*, see the comments above.

40 Owing to either the limited occurrence of the individuals in the archive, or the lack of information conveyed about them in the surviving texts.

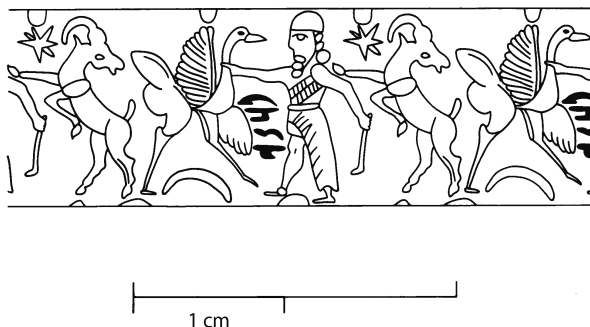


Figure 6: Collated line drawing of PFS 9* (scale 2:1).

Currently we can with certainty recognize three clear levels among the top of the administrative elite whom we encounter in the Fortification archive. Future research seems promising in sharpening the resolution for groups below these three uppermost ones.

At the very top of the socio-administrative system represented by the Fortification archive is the king himself. Darius is an active presence in the agency.⁴¹ He gives orders (via Parnaka, Ziššawiš, et al.) for the disbursement of commodities and the management of his estates; he is a travel destination for a wide range of administrators and court officials; he travels through Fārs, accompanied by an enormous entourage, drawing commodities for his table; etc. None too surprisingly, the archive does not preserve the “king’s seal,” although many commentators have mistakenly identified such (see the comments of Garrison, in press a). Parnaka, and his seal(s), for all intents and purposes, are the king’s representative.

Below the king is a small, select group consisting of members of the royal family, by blood or marriage, and individuals who hail from the families of the six other conspirators in the regicide of 522 BCE. Of the former the most prominent are Parnaka and the three royal women, Irtašduna, Irdabama, and Udusana.⁴² We have, of course, the two seals of Parnaka (PFS 9* and PFS 16*) (Figs. 6–7) and seals for two of the royal women, Irtašduna (PFS 38) (Fig. 8) and Irdabama (PFS 51) (Fig. 5). A handful of texts (PF 733–734, 2035) pair Irtašduna with her son, Iršama (OP Aršāma), in a special type of transaction where commodities *Irtašduna Iršama tibba makka*, ‘[are] consumed before the woman Irtašduna and

⁴¹ Cf. the remarks of Henkelman (2010a: 669–70), “the king is the principal actor in the Fortification archive...” and is “referred to more often than Parnakka, the director of the Persepolis economy.” On the presence of the king in the Fortification archive, see, among many studies, Garrison 1991; Tuplin 1998; Henkelman 2010a: 669–92.

⁴² Of the royal women, much has been written; see, for example, Brosius 1996, 2010; Henkelman 2010b; Lerner 2010.

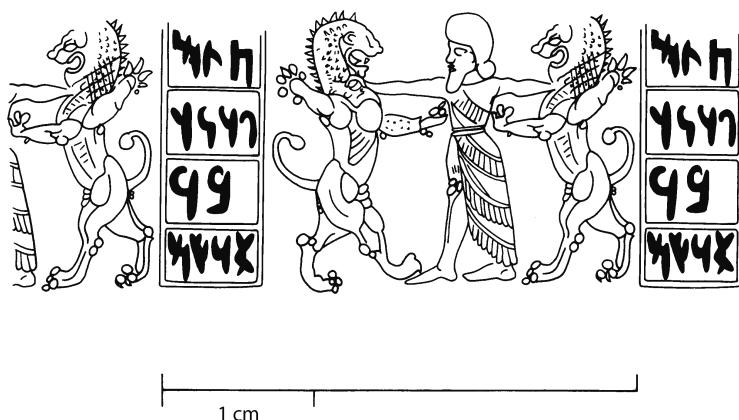


Figure 7: Collated line drawing of PFS 16* (scale 2:1).

Iršama.⁴³ Iršama also occurs on his own in a letter-order (NN 958) concerning the issuance of *tarmu*-grain at his *uhli*, ‘estate, (royal) house,’ at Matannan(?).⁴⁴ Remarkably, the seal of Iršama, PFS 2899* (Fig. 9), has recently been identified on a fragmentary unpublished Elamite document as well as the letter-order NN 95B.⁴⁵

Darius awarded his six co-conspirators, and their families, special privileges.⁴⁶ In his account of the events of 522 BCE, Herodotus mentions the various connections of several of the conspirators to the Teispid house by blood and marriage; thus, these men, and their families, represented the highest level of Persian nobility. Two members of the six co-conspiratorial families are identifiable in the Fortification archive, Kambarma and Ašbazana⁴⁷ Interestingly, it is the very same

⁴³ PF 2035 reads ^{SAL}*Irtašduna Iršama tibba kitka*, ‘poured out before the woman Irtašduna and Iršama.’ The transaction category (Hallock’s J texts [“royal provisions”]) have been frequently discussed, most recently by Henkelman 2010a, with previous bibliography.

⁴⁴ The Iršama named in PF 309 may be the same person. Aršāma, the son of Darius and Irtašduna, is mentioned also in Herodotus VII.69.2 as a commander in Xerxes’ expedition to Greece.

⁴⁵ Fort. 965–201. The seal is the same seal that occurs on bullae associated with the correspondence (on parchment) of the satrap Aršāma, a ‘prince of the house,’ now housed in the Bodleian library at Oxford (TADe A6.3–6.16, D6.3–6.14). That correspondence dates sometime to the second half of the 5th century BCE; thus, the seal PFS 2899* when used to seal the parchment letters was an heirloom two or more generations removed from its original context in the Fortification archive (Garrison, in preparation).

⁴⁶ The now-famous “Conspiracy of the Seven” is preserved in Herodotus III.68–88 and in Darius’ inscription at Bisotūn (DB). The conspirators, as named by Herodotus, were Darius, Intaphernes, Otanes, Gobryas, Hydarnes, Megabyzus, and Aspathines; at DB IV.18 the six other conspirators, all noted as Persians, are Vidafarnah, Utāna, Gaubaruva, Vidarna, Bagabuxša, and Ardumaniš (see Briant 2002: 107–13, 128–37, 898, 901–903 for a discussion of Darius’ seizure of power, the versions as preserved in Herodotus and at Bisotūn, the careers of some of the Seven, etc.) At DB IV.18–19 Darius invokes special privileges/protection for the families of these men.

⁴⁷ Herodotus and the inscription at Bisotūn are not in accord concerning the seventh member, Aspathines and Ardumaniš respectively.

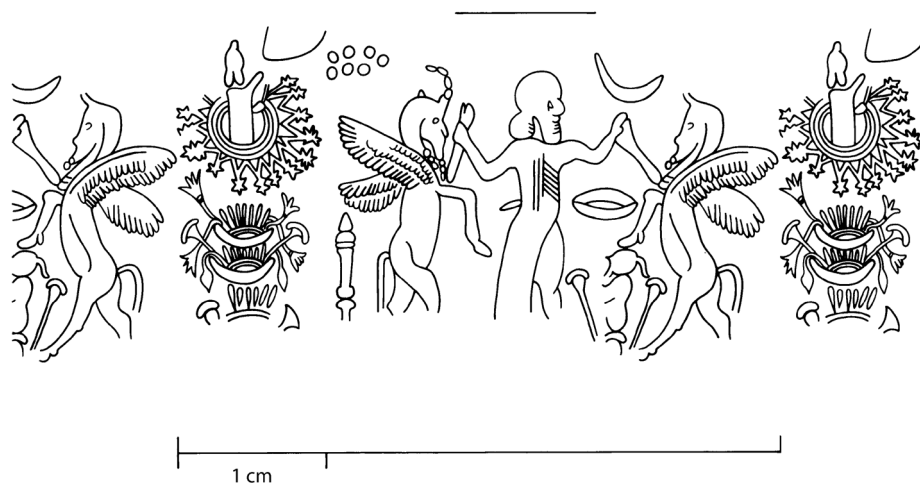


Figure 8: Collated line drawing of PFS 38 (scale 2:1).

Kambarma and Ašbazana who are named and depicted on Darius' tomb façade at Naqš-e Rostam, the only individuals so distinguished in the whole of official Achaemenid monumental relief.⁴⁸ It hardly needs stressing that their appearance, with accompanying inscriptions, on the tomb relief underscores their exalted status. The inscriptions on the tomb relief give Kambarma and Ašbazana ceremonial titles, yet another testament to their lofty positions at court. Kambarma is (DNe, Elamite):

Kambarma Pattišmarriš-na Dariyawiš
EŠŠANA-na sirum kuktira

'Kambarma the *Pattišmarriš*, lance-bearer of King Darius.'

Ašbazana is (DNd, Elamite):

Ašbazana lipte kuktira Dariyawiš
EŠŠANA apte marriš

'Ašbazana, *lipte-bearer*, holds the bow-and-arrow case of Darius the king.'⁴⁹

⁴⁸ For Kambarma and Ašbazana on Darius' rock-cut tomb façade at Naqš-e Rostam, see Schmidt 1970: 86, pls. 19, 22A, and 23–24.

⁴⁹ The OP version has *vačabara* for *lipte kutira*; the terms have been much discussed (see, for example, Briant 2002: 108–109, 113, 214, 880, 898; Garrison 1998: 116; Henkelman 2003: 117–26, 162–64, who renders the terms as 'garment-bearer'). Henkelman (2003: 119–20) notes that the second part of DNd, *apte marriš*, in fact is meant to convey a title, but was purposely rendered as a finite verbal form in order to avoid the duplication in the first part of the inscription, *lipte kuktira*.



Figure 9: Collated line drawing of PFS 2899* (scale 2:1).

In what can only be characterized as an extraordinary situation, we have the personal seals of both Kambarma and Ašbazana, PFS 857s (Fig. 10) and PFS 1567* (Fig. 11) respectively.⁵⁰

The seals belonging to this particular social group, members of the royal family and the conspiratorial families, fall into one of the three following “profiles”:⁵¹

A-1 heirloom seals from the formative, pre-empire period of the highlands: PFS 51 (Fig. 5), the seal of the royal woman Irdabama;⁵²

A-2 rich and elaborate Assyrianizing imagery and style: PFS 16* (Fig. 7), the seal of Parnaka; PFS 38 (Fig. 8), the seal of the royal woman Irtašduna; PFS 1567*, the seal of Ašbazana (Fig. 11);

A-3 very large seals of unique thematic, compositional, and/or iconographic content, rendered in complex stylistic idioms: PFS 2899* (Fig. 9), the seal of Iršama; PFS 857s (Fig. 10), the seal of Kambarma.

The seals of this exalted group of Persepolitan elite are sometimes inscribed, a phenomenon that is rare in Persepolitan glyptic and most clearly a marker of high status/rank (see Garrison 2006: 70–72; 2011a: 57–61; in press a). Nevertheless, inscriptions clearly are not a diagnostic feature since the seals of the royal women Irtašduna (PFS 38) and Irdabama (PFS 51) and the seal of Kambarma (PFS 857s) are uninscribed.

At a level at least one step removed from the royal and conspiratorial families, and perhaps more, are administrators who clearly have high authority in the Fortification archive, but, as far as the evidence currently stands, have no direct linkages to the royal or conspiratorial families via blood or marriage. Of this group, which potentially could number as high as twenty individuals, I would highlight the following: Ziššawiš, the deputy-director of the agency represented by the Fortification archive (PFS 11*; Fig. 13); Baradkama (Old Iranian **Baratkāma*), an important *šaramanna* official who, in the Treasury archive, assumes the office of the Treasurer at Persepolis (PFS 113*; Fig. 14); Irdumartiya, an important army commander and *bandaka* (‘vassal,’ ‘loyal servant’) named at Bisotūn (DB III.28–49) (PFS 71*; Fig. 15); Harrena, a *kasabattiš* (‘cattle chief’) and *šaramanna* official (PFS 1568*; Fig. 16).⁵³ The archive preserves the personal seals of each of these individuals.

⁵⁰ On PFS 857s, see Root 1990: 130–31, fig. 13; Root 1991: 19–21, fig. 4; Root 1996: 21, pl. 3, fig. 10; Garrison 2000: 156; Boardman 2000: 166, fig. 5.23; Gates 2002: 106, 115, 126–127, fig. 1; Root 2002: 202; Root 2003: 25, note 6. On PFS 1567*, see Garrison 1998.

⁵¹ The letter-number designations A-1, B-1, etc. that follow are not meant to code specific typological markers, but simply to serve as aids in the discussion.

⁵² A companion seal is the famous heirloom PFS 93* (Figs. 3–4); see above and Garrison 2011b.

⁵³ The exact duties and rank indicated by the title *kasabattiš* are not clear, although he is the only individual so designated in the archive and in general cattle appear to fall under a special, perhaps royal, jurisdiction. On cattle and royal oversight, see Henkelman 2008a: 422–26, “royal earmarking of livestock” (p. 423). On the officials qualified as *šaramanna* and *damanna*, see the comments above.

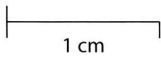


Figure 10: Collated line drawing of PFS 857s (scale 2:1).

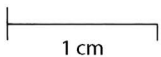
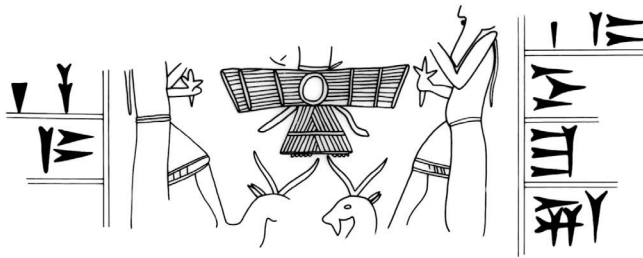


Figure 11: Collated line drawing of PFS 1567* (scale 2:1).

The seals belonging to this particular social group, high-rank administrators at a remove from the royal and conspiratorial families, fall principally into one of two “profiles”:

B-1 large and well-made seals executed in the Persepolitan Court Style; in a few cases, for example, the seal of Ziššawiš, PFS 11* (Fig. 13), and the seal of Baradkama, PFS 113* (Fig. 14), these seals carry royal-name inscriptions.⁵⁴ Iconographically, Court Style seals are characterized by extensive and insistent inclusion of multiple elements of what we may call court-centric iconography: that is, the Persian

⁵⁴ The royal-name seals of Darius are discussed in some detail in Garrison, in press a.

Court robe, dentate crown, staff, baton, flower, bow and arrow, quiver (often elaborately decorated), the figure in the winged disk, the winged ring/disk, date palms, royal-name inscription, bulls, and human-headed or human-faced bulls. Of course, no seal exhibits all of these iconographic traits, and many seals allow other features (for example, lions, which are commonly associated with kingship in Achaemenid art, but by no means are diagnostic of it).

B-2 court-centric iconography rendered in a rich Modeled Style of carving: for example, the seal of Irdumartiya, PFS 71* (Fig. 15), and the seal of Harrena, PFS 1568* (Fig. 16).⁵⁵ Seals within this category are large and impressively made. These seals are often characterized by lively and innovative compositions and unusual renderings of court-centric iconography. Both features may, I think, be indicative of the early, formative phases of the Persepolitan Court Style.

Seals belonging to members of this particular socio-administrative group tend, overwhelmingly, to carry inscriptions.

As noted, Parnaka and Ziššawiš, the director and deputy-director of the agency, each have two separate seals, an initial seal that is then replaced by a second, and new, seal. The imagery of those seals, and the process of the introduction of the new seals, offer some interesting insights into not only the socio-administrative hierarchies discussed above, but also the dynamics within them.

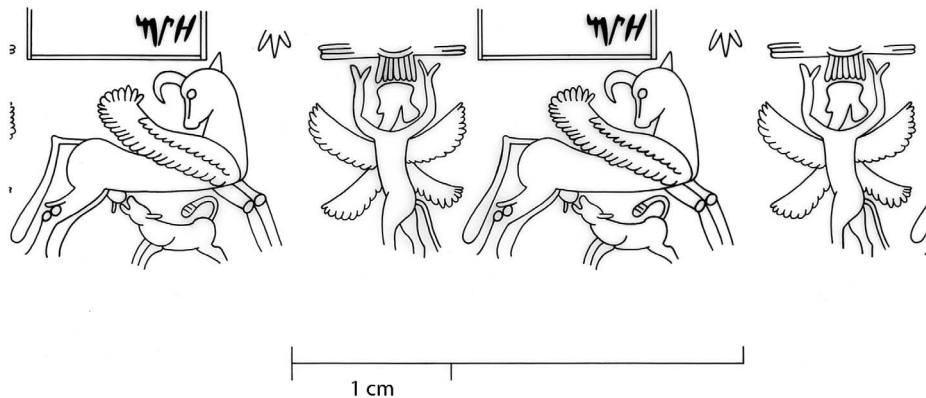


Figure 12: Collated line drawing of PFS 83* (scale 2:1).

⁵⁵ On Irdumartiya and PFS 71*, see the discussion in Garrison, in press b, and Henkelman 2008a: 127, n. 283, with previous bibliography. It seems noteworthy that there are only four seals that occur in both the Fortification and Treasury archives. Two of them belong to men in this particular socio-administrative group: Irdumartiya, with PFS 71* (=PTS 33*), and Baradkama, with PFS 113* (=PTS 4*).

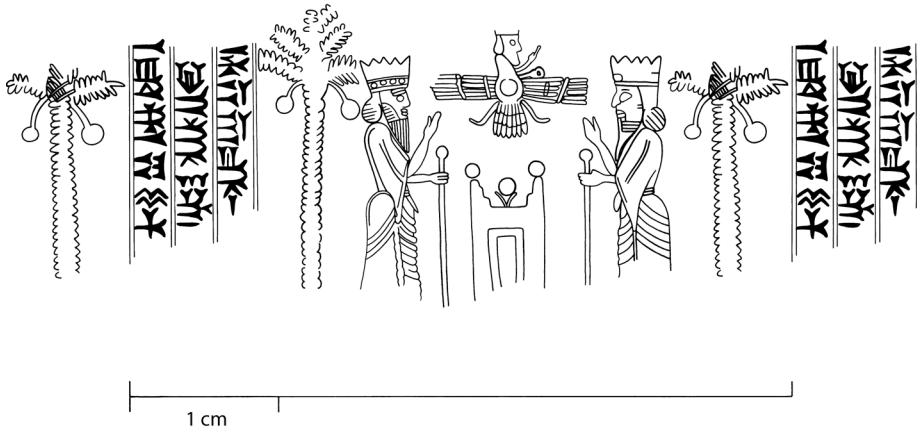


Figure 13: Collated line drawing of PFS 11* (scale 2:1).

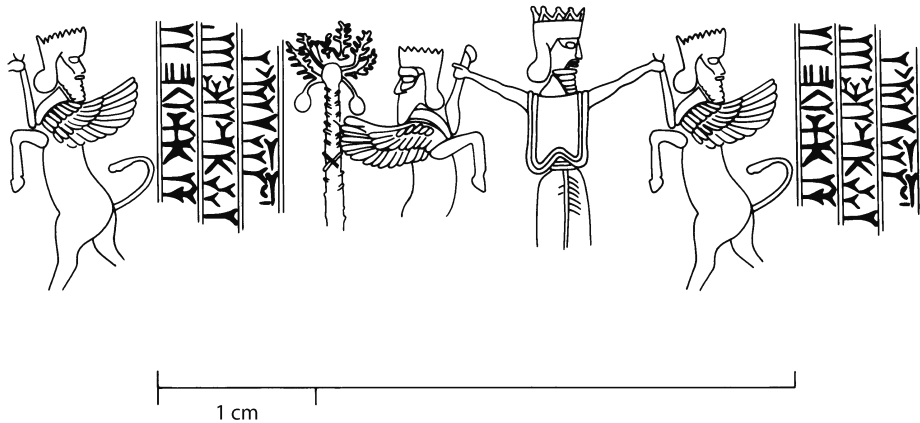


Figure 14: Collated line drawing of PFS 113* (scale 2:1).

The first seals that Parnaka and Ziššawiš employ, PFS 9* (Fig. 6) and PFS 83* (Fig. 12) respectively, directly relate to each other on multiple levels. Both seals show strong Assyrianizing imagery; in the case of PFS 9*, a heroic encounter involving a hero in an Assyrianizing garment holding an archaizing weapon and engaged with an ostrich, in the case of PFS 83*, a combination of two Assyrianizing themes, a cow suckling a calf and an atlantid bull-man holding aloft a winged symbol.⁵⁶ Both seals carry Aramaic inscriptions and, in the upper field, a star. Both seals are rendered in a

⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of the imagery on PFS 83*, see Garrison, in press b; for PFS 9*, see Garrison and Root 2001: 404–406 (Cat. No. 288).

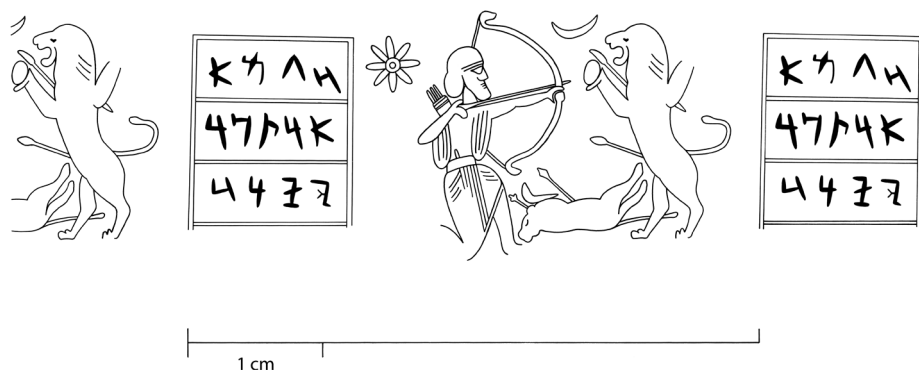


Figure 15: Collated line drawing of PFS 71* (scale 1.8:1).

restrained modeled style of carving; in the case of PFS 9* the carving is plain enough that one may characterize it as the local Fortification Style.⁵⁷

Within two years at the close of the 6th century BCE, both Parnaka and Ziššawiš begin using new seals that replace their former ones. Unusual colophons on two letter-orders issued by Parnaka, PF 2067 and 2068, announce his change of seals in a rather striking manner:

‘Also, the seal that formerly (was) mine has been replaced. Now this seal (is) mine that has been applied to this tablet.’ (PF 2067)

‘Also, the seal that formerly (was) mine, that seal has been replaced. Now this seal that has been applied (to) this tablet (is) mine.’ (PF 2068)

Parnaka’s new seal is PFS 16* (Fig. 7). Both texts are dated to the 22nd year, 3rd month, 16th day, that is, 6 June 500 BCE. The latest dated attestation of PFS 9*, Parnaka’s first seal, is in the 22nd year, 3rd month, that is, May/June 500 BCE. Thus, for all intents and purposes, PFS 16* instantaneously replaces PFS 9*. As PFS 16* is clearly a special commissioned seal (see below), it may be one of the most accurately dated images from the whole of the ancient world!

No text announces the appearance of Ziššawiš new seal, PFS 11* (Fig. 13). The earliest dated attestation of the seal, on PF 678, is in the 19th year, 10th and 11th months, mid-January through early March 502 BCE. There is just over a one-year hiatus between the latest attestation (18th year, 9th month, November/December 504 BCE) of Ziššawiš’ first seal, PFS 83*, and the earliest dated attestation of PFS 11*. The hiatus may reflect a lacuna in the documentation, or a real period of time during

⁵⁷ On style groups in Persepolitan glyptic, see Garrison and Root 2001: 16–20.

which Ziššawiš did not use a seal in association with the ration system represented by the Fortification archive.⁵⁸

The two new seals, PFS 16* and PFS 11*, are both striking glyptic artifacts, carved by two of the most accomplished master carvers whose work is preserved in the archive. The two seals are, however, worlds apart in their imagery.

PFS 16* (Fig. 7), a heroic encounter, is an Assyrianizing masterpiece executed in a baroque modeled style of carving. PFS 16* is thus directly linked to what we could conceptualize as the “image milieu” of PFS 9* and PFS 83*. PFS 16* exceeds, however, both of the initial seals, PFS 9* and PFS 83*, in its evocation of Assyrian art. Indeed, PFS 16* is perhaps the most extravagantly Assyrianizing image in the whole of the glyptic corpus from the archive; its overtly Assyrianizing theme and style align it with the imagery associated with that exceptional group consisting of members of the royal family and/or the conspiratorial families (the imagery sub-group A-2, above), most notably the royal woman Irtašduna (PFS 38) (Fig. 8) and the ‘*lip̄te*-bearer’ Ašbazana (PFS 1567*) (Fig. 11).

The Aramaic inscription on PFS 16*, unlike the Aramaic inscription on PFS 9*, includes a patronymic:

‘Seal of Parnaka, son of Aršāma’

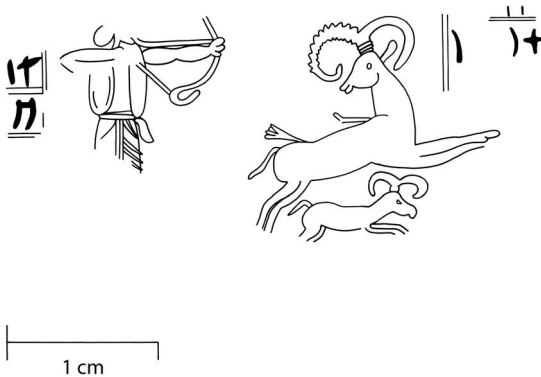


Figure 16: Collated line drawing of PFS 1568* (scale 2:1).

⁵⁸ See the discussion in Henkelman 2008a: 173–77 and Garrison, in press b, concerning the uneven chronological distribution of the dated memoranda, journals, and accounts from the Fortification archive. The journal NN 2493 records Ziššawiš receiving wine rations and issuing *halmi*-documents throughout the 19th year; thus, he seems to be active in the region during the hiatus in seal usage. I am inclined to see the lacuna in seal usage between PFS 83* and PFS 11* as simply reflecting the chance nature of the survival of the documentation.

The addition of this particular patronymic, Aršāma, a name well-attested in the Achaemenid royal house, on the inscription of his new seal would seem to highlight the personal, familial connection that Parnaka has to the royal family.⁵⁹

In contrast, PFS 11*, a scene showing two crowned figures facing a tower structure and winged symbol, flanked by date palms, is rendered in a richly modeled version of the Persepolitan Court Style. The seal is one of the earliest dated examples of the Persepolitan Court Style. It announces a new “image milieu,” that associated directly with Achaemenid imperial ideology. The imagery (and royal-name inscription) of PFS 11* clearly link it with the imagery (sub-groups B-1 and B-2, above) associated with a class of high-rank administrators some remove in administrative rank from the likes of Parnaka. The imagery of all the seals in this small group of administrators is emphatically, indeed, insistently, court-centric.

The trilingual royal-name inscription on PFS 11* intensifies/echoes the court-centric imagery:

‘I, Darius, King’ (in Babylonian, ‘Great King’)

The royal-name inscription establishes a completely different tone from an inscription that carries the seal user’s personal name (and patronymic). The royal-name inscription, in tandem with the court-centric iconography, define/highlight Ziššawiš’ relation to the king in a distinctly, and exclusively, official context.⁶⁰

In a detailed study of the royal-name seals of Darius (Garrison, in press, a), it is argued that the principal function of PFS 11* and related Court Style seals appears to have been the public declaration of specific ties/relationship between a particular segment of the administrative elite (well below the level of Parnaka, Irtašduna, Ašbazana, etc.) and the king. In the cases of a handful of individuals, these ties to the king are cemented through the appearance of trilingual royal-name inscriptions. Court Style seals are, of course, also part of a larger visual program, expressed in monumental relief and coinage, that sought to define a new, and distinctively Achaemenid ideology of kingship. In glyptic, however, early Court Style seals appear to operate primarily as vehicles for the articulation/negotiation of social forces having

⁵⁹ This is not to say that all seals within the archive carrying a patronymic in their inscriptions functioned in this manner. It is the particular set of circumstances surrounding PFS 9*, PFS 16*, and Parnaka that so charges the inscription on PFS 16*; note that the Aramaic inscription on PFS 9* simply states the personal name, ‘Parnaka,’ without the patronymic. One should note here that there is no absolute proof that the Aršāma named in the inscription on PFS 16* is the same individual as the grandfather of Darius named in DB I.1–4 and DBa.4. Given, however, that a son of Darius and the royal prince of the 5th century BCE (see above note 45) also bore the name Aršāma, it is clear that the name was an important one in the Achaemenid royal house.

⁶⁰ In opposition to the familial terms on Parnaka’s seal, PFS 16*. Here again, the inscription on the initial seal provides interesting insights: although the full extent of the Aramaic inscription on PFS 83*, Ziššawiš’ first seal, is not preserved, it most certainly read ‘Seal of Ziššawiš.’ The only name on the inscription on his new seal, PFS 11*, of course, is Darius.

more to do with personal relationships than abstracted concepts of imperial ideology (see Garrison, in press a and b, for fuller treatment of these concepts).

Whereas the imagery of the initial seals of Parnaka and Ziššawiš would appear to offer little by way of distinction between the two, the situation is radically altered with the appearance of their new seals in the period 502–500 BCE. That the director and deputy-director of the agency replace their seals within two years of each other, that those seals are such special glyptic artifacts, and that they are so distinct from each other in their imagery and carving styles surely cannot be fortuitous. These circumstances suggest that the appearance of these two seals signals a complex sharpening of socio-administrative hierarchies among the elite at Persepolis in the last decade of the 6th century BCE.

The reasons why at this particular time there appears to have been a reassessment of administrative hierarchies, and, by extension, visual protocols, is not known to us. Most likely there was a concurrence of factors. First, the time would certainly have been ripe for considering issues of social-administrative hierarchies at the center of the empire. The bloody and chaotic events of 522 BCE and its aftermath were now definitely settled and almost two decades removed. Second, Darius, who had spent much of the decade of 520–510 BCE away from the Iranian heartland dealing both with the aftermath of 522 BCE and expansion/consolidation of the borders of the empire, at last was able to spend some time in his homeland. Third, the considerable administrative needs of the new empire would have resulted in the emergence of a new “bureaucratic elite,” especially at the two most important imperial capitals, Susa and Persepolis, and along the important axis between them. While members of the royal and co-conspiratorial families were available to staff satrapal-level appointments, ceremonial offices surrounding the king, etc., a cadre of newcomers would have had to be recruited and trained to run the machinery of empire (two aspects of which are exemplified by the Fortification and Treasury archives). The twenty years since 522 BCE would have seen that new bureaucratic elite mature and stratify, producing administrators of talent and ambition, such as Ziššawiš, Baradkama, and others, as documented in the Persepolitan archives.

At Persepolis, at least, both the new bureaucratic elite and the king would have been keenly aware of the former’s lack of connectedness by blood, marriage, or direct involvement in the events of 522 BCE to the latter. The emergence of the Court Style in glyptic, clearly targeted at the new administrative elite, may thus have been one of multiple strategies to establish tokens of connection between these administrators and the king. Whether the impetus for this came from the new bureaucratic elite, the king, or both, we do not know. In contrast, members of the royal and co-conspiratorial families would have had little concern (as a group) with such issues of connectedness to the king. For this group, the very highest level of Achaemenid society, their history and position within Achaemenid imperial culture had literally been set in stone at Bisotūn and Naqš-e Rostam. Their glyptic imagery, in many cases heirloom seals or heavily Assyrianizing modes of presentation, suggests that their concern was with

maintaining and highlighting their link to the past. One could perhaps also suggest that their glyptic imagery was an attempt to maintain a distinct identity within an imperial phenomenon that was rapidly reaching canonization in terms of visual expression.⁶¹

Although this study has focused upon the upper levels of the Achaemenid elite and Persepolitan administrators, the wealth of data linking seal imagery with specific officials and offices within the Fortification and Treasury archives offers the potential to pursue similar analyses for individuals farther down the socio-administrative spectrum. This is especially the case for certain tight clusters of officials for whom we have extended documentation. Preliminary analyses of seals representing supply offices, accounting officials and offices (a particularly circumscribed activity in the Fortification archive), and officials qualified as *šaramanna* and *damanna* are yielding encouraging results along these lines (Mikołajczak 2010; Garrison, in press b).

Abbreviations

DB: Trilingual inscription of Darius carved on the mountain Bisotūn. There are various editions of the texts: for the Old Persian, see Schmitt 1991; for the Babylonian, von Voigtlander 1978 and Malbran-Labat 1994; for the Elamite, Weissbach 1911 and Grillot-Susini, Herrenschildt and Malbran-Labat 1993.

NN: Elamite document from the Persepolis Fortification archive edited by Richard T. Hallock, now collated in preparation for publication by Wouter F.M. Henkelman.

PF: Elamite document from the Persepolis Fortification archive published by Hallock 1969.

PFa: Elamite document from the Persepolis Fortification archive published by Hallock 1978.

PFAT: Aramaic document from the Persepolis Fortification archive edited by Raymond A. Bowman. Now collated in preparation for publication by Annalisa Azzoni.

PFATS: Seal that occurs exclusively on the Aramaic documents from the Persepolis Fortification archive.

PFS: Seal that occurs on the Elamite documents and, potentially, also Aramaic and/or uninscribed documents from the Persepolis Fortification archive.

PFUT: Uninscribed document from the Persepolis Fortification archive.

⁶¹ The two seals of Ašbazana, PFS 1567* (Fig. 11) and PTS 14*, are in this regard exceptionally interesting. His first seal, PFS 1567*, used only in the Fortification archive (in Darius year 28, 494/493 BCE), is heavily Assyrianizing in both style and imagery. His second seal, PTS 14*, used only in the Treasury archive (earliest attestation in Xerxes year 2, 484/483 BCE), employs exactly the same theme, but elements of iconography have been updated to Achaemenid court-centric norms. This may suggest that the pressure to conform to the visual canon had increased in the early years of Xerxes (on the two seals, see Garrison 1998). Certainly, the relatively large number of Court Style seals and the lack of any Assyrianizing masterpieces such as PFS 16* within the Treasury archive would suggest such. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact status/rank of other individuals who issue letter-orders in the Treasury archive, or of the Treasurer himself. As an individual of exceptionally high status, Ašbazana may be an oddity within the Treasury archive.

PFUTS: Seal that occurs on the uninscribed documents and, potentially, also Aramaic documents from the Persepolis Fortification archive.

TADE: Aramaic documents published in Porten and Yardeni 1987–1999.

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Brian A. Brown

Culture on Display: Representations of Ethnicity in the Art of the Late Assyrian State

Abstract: From at least the Akkadian period onward, the art of ancient Mesopotamia made sporadic use of the depiction of “others,” particularly in scenes of warfare. During the Late Assyrian period (ca. 900–612 BCE), though, there is a veritable explosion of interest in depicting “others” in the royal monumental art of the state palaces. The earliest of these depictions, in the reign of Assurnasirpal II, essentially use standard “Assyrian” representations, with foreignness marked by a few stereotypical accoutrements, but by the reign of Assurbanipal (668–ca. 627 BCE), depictions of foreigners/non-Assyrians make heavy use of specific geographic terrains associated with homelands, clothing, jewelry, hairstyles and other aspects of material culture. This suite of identifying features points to a recognition of ethnic identities in the Assyrian empire, as well as a desire to use them in political contexts. These ethnic distinctions in the royal artwork were intimately tied up with the political and demographic changes in the empire.

Keywords: Assyria, empire, ethnicity, visual culture, display, culture, imperialism, reliefs, group identities

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Introduction

It is well known that social identities do not appear in isolation, but rather when people and peoples come into contact with others. Because of the sheer scale of the populations and geographies involved in imperialist encounters, as well as the concomitant ruptures in social orders, the history of imperialism provides some of the most interesting examples of how various corporate identities are formed, changed, and maintained. But though people live out their various identities in everyday life, the ruling classes and administrators of empires are in a much more powerful situation to actively represent and shape those means of identification and, by extension, the social action that they structure.

Though imperial authorities may manipulate representations of all kinds of identities, the display of foreign cultures seems to take an especially prominent place in the official discourses of empires. Imperialist encounters are often times of rapid and fundamental change for all people(s) involved. Because of this, identities

that focus on seemingly fixed, unchanging or “natural” points of reference, including landscapes or geographic places, family and ancestors, and particular ways of doing things, can provide a sense of stability and continuity. From the perspective of the managers of empire, casting the humans on the receiving end of imperialism in terms of such concepts has the advantage of linking together populations and territory and is thus an effective way of categorizing the diverse peoples and lands that are to be conquered and absorbed.

The Late Assyrian period (ca. 912–612 BCE) is notable for many reasons, one of which was the development of the world’s first true “empire.”¹ An important part of this drive to empire was the development of a multi-faceted “global” ideology that stressed the centrality and dominance of the Assyrian state. Though this ideology was disseminated through several channels, perhaps the most impressive was imagery carved in relief on stone orthostats in several palaces in the capital cities of Nimrud/Kalhu, Dur Sharrukin/Khorsabad and Nineveh. Assyria’s ruling class used this new monumental visual culture to record and, seen another way, to create its accomplishments. And among the subjects depicted, it is no coincidence that images of peoples and landscape are among the most frequent.

This article examines some aspects of the representation of peoples, mostly foreign but also Assyrian, in the monumental state art, represented by the stone reliefs of the palaces, between the ninth and seventh centuries BCE. This art develops towards greater specificity, which is tied in closely with the Assyrian ruling class’s conception of geography and landscape. This trend towards greater specificity, greater “realism,” in the depiction of people and peoples can in some cases be suitably analyzed in terms of our concept of ethnicity. This increasing interest in ethnic depiction can be linked to other forms of ideological expression, notably the texts, and the changing demographics of the Assyrian state itself.

Displaying Ethnicity

What is Ethnicity?

Before examining the evidence supplied by the art of the Assyrian empire, I should discuss briefly what I mean by ethnicity. Over the past several decades, the concept of ethnicity has become an important analytical tool in the social sciences (see, for example, Eriksen 2010; Fenton 2010; Guiberneau and Rex 2010;

¹ On this point, see in particular the discussion of Liverani 2005. The concepts of “empire” and “imperialism” are beyond the scope of this paper; I take it for granted here that the Late Assyrian state was an empire, if not already in the ninth century BCE then certainly by the end of the eighth century. I will deal with these issues in a future article; for now, see Morris and Scheidel 2009 and literature.

for archaeology specifically, see Emberling 1997; Lucy 2005, among others). Specifics of the definition remain contested, however, and there is no one single generally accepted definition (Fenton 2010: 187–88). Nevertheless, a definition is necessary for several reasons. One is to clarify the social phenomenon under discussion; as is frequently remarked upon (for example, Eriksen 2010: 5; Emberling 1997: 300), lack of a definition leaves the concept vague and of questionable value in analysis. Another is to allow comparison through space and time (Eriksen 2010: 18). Yet another, and particularly relevant for this study, is the ambivalence that seems to attach to the use of the term in studies on the ancient Near East, despite the commonness of the idea in the scholarship (see Emberling 1997: 298, Tab. 1). For example, the contributions in one major volume on the subject (van Soldt 2005) rarely define the term, or do so without referring to anthropological or sociological studies, while another (Bahrani 2006) consistently conflates “race” and “ethnicity” (see, for example, p. 51), despite the fact that the two have long been dissociated in the scholarship (see, for example, Eriksen 2010: 5–9).

For our purposes here, elements of some of the most common approaches to ethnicity can be pulled together to provide a general working definition. Ethnicity is a term that describes social relationships structured around differences that are based on and communicated by commonly accepted markers of such differentiation. Distinguishing ethnicity from other types of social identity (class, gender, interest groups, and “race,” for example) are several important characteristics. One is an idea or myth of common descent or origin (Eriksen 2010: 17). In other words, actual biological descent is not important, but rather a socially constructed discourse of such descent. Related to this is the idea of a shared history. Frequently common to both of these characteristics is territory – a homeland or landscape that is associated with the beginnings and/or important point(s) in the history of the group (Lucy 2005: 101; cf. Fenton 2010: 21; Eriksen 2010: 186–87); this is not necessarily identical to actual political control of the territory (that is, a state). Finally, certain cultural markers, such as dress/appearance, food, architecture, religion and behavior may be drawn upon in order to mark ethnic difference (Lucy 2005: 101–108).

Thus, ethnicity, as used in this article, is an expression of difference drawing on these various cultural factors. Although ethnicities can and often are very durable through time, they are not an inherent property of particular groups – the “cultural stuff” that is used in defining and expressing this ethnic difference may, and often does, change through time (in the sense of the dynamic identified in Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Furthermore, ethnicity need not be the only or most important means of social identification. Indeed, people frequently have a variety of identities, and ethnicity’s appearance and importance is dependent upon context (see Fenton 2010: 188); in some or even many cases, it may not factor into social relationships at all.

The State and Representations of Culture

One context in which ethnicity consistently seems to be prominent is at the state level. It is true that ethnic identities form, are maintained, and change at the level of everyday life – when people interact with people in the course of carrying out the full range of human activities (see Lucy 2005: 96–97, 101). Yet they can also be heavily influenced, or even imposed to an extent, from above. In the modern world, states actively intervene in the ethnic self-identification of people and groups through such means as censuses and the law (see Eriksen 2010: 147–73). But other forms of state intervention affecting, or effecting, ethnic identities existed in pre-modern societies. In a world defined by expansive states and, especially, empires, conquest and annexation of land, and by extension the associated populations, was one of the most frequent.

Such interventions naturally have major impacts on the ways that people live their everyday lives, but because ideologies are so important to expansive states and empires, there are also important symbolic and semiotic aspects as well. Peoples and lands involved in encounters with empire are thus often depicted in official state media, including the art. While there are many reasons why this is the case – such as a desire to record a verifiable history or to commemorate triumphs – the various characteristics relating to ethnic identification make representations of different peoples particularly suited for official state display.

Perhaps the most important reason is the connection that ethnic identification offers with both the past, through the ideas of descent and shared history, and the present, in the form of a people's presence on their land (a target for empire). As noted above, imperial encounters frequently involve large-scale social, demographic and economic changes for people on both sides. Ethnic identification offers a way of maintaining continuity in the face of such fundamental changes. In Antonaccio's words, "it is precisely because of the criteria of homeland and descent, in the midst of mobility, contact, and interchange, that ethnicity is a relevant and powerful category" (2010: 46; see also Eriksen 2010: 81). Visual depictions of the "others" of imperialist encounters, drawing on, manipulating, or even inventing, selective aspects of this history thus provide one tangible, easily accessible way of self-identification, through means of an opposition of "us versus them," during periods of conquest. Or, as Eriksen (2010: 81) puts it, they may be one of the "conspicuous forms of boundary maintenance [that] become important when the boundaries are under pressure." Through depictions of the peoples subject to imperialism, imperial ruling classes can define both these "others" and the home population whose mobilization is necessary for the imperial enterprise in the first place.

But we should be skeptical about such depictions. These are not neutral portrayals; rather, their appearance in official media like art serves political ends, however "realistic" they are and whatever other roles they fill. In this sense, these depictions create groups, groups that take their place in conflict with other

groups.² As Brubaker (2002: 166) remarks, “participants’ accounts [in conflicts with a supposed “ethnic” basis]... often have what Pierre Bourdieu has called a performative character. By invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being. Their categories are for doing – designed to stir, summon, justify, mobilize, kindle and energize.” Thus, according to this perspective, what is supposedly being simply described (an ethnic group, with particular characteristics, in a conflict with the describing group) is in fact being created for particular purposes.

This creation of groups serves a vital role in empires and other kinds of expansive states, namely creating categories in the world that serve to order effective action. Official visual representations of people and their associated lands can be understood as one of several “state forms of classification” that helps establish ways of perceiving and living in the world (Bourdieu 1994: 7, 13). Focusing on particular features through which to define entire groups seems key; as Lucy (2005: 98) puts it, “[b]eing able to group others through the use of stereotypes (in the sense of the application of standardised notions of the cultural distinctiveness of a group) helps to create order, and enables people to know how to behave towards those others.” Thus, these kinds of representations have a real efficacy in society, if not in the self-definitions of groups and their members directly, then indirectly through helping establish the basis of how agents of empire define and interact with them.

The Development of the Image of Other Peoples in Assyrian State Art

It has been long recognized that the Assyrian ruling class was keen on displaying the different peoples that the state had conquered, as well as the lands with which they were associated.³ As will be shown below, this was achieved with an emphasis on details not only of dress and appearance, but also material culture ranging from city architecture down to the level of the lowly water jug or reed basket, all located in “accurate” landscapes. But despite the enormous literature that touches on the subject, there have been relatively few studies devoted to this issue specifically from the point of view of ethnicity, its display, and its changes through time in the Assyrian state. In this section, I build upon previous work on the topic to trace the trends of

² As Bourdieu remarks (1994: 12), “[t]he most brutal relations of force are always simultaneously symbolic relations.”

³ Without pretending to completeness, I can cite here: Paterson 1912; Barnett 1960: 11–19; Barnett and Falkner 1962: 40–41; Frankfort 1996 [1954]: 157–86; Barnett *et al.* 1998; Wäfler 1975; Reade 1972, 1979a, b, c, 1998; Winter 1983a; Cifarelli 1998; Collins 2008; Collon 2005; Nadali 2005; Reed 2007; Schachner 2007; Russell 1991, 1998; for depictions of landscape and territory, see for example Marcus 1987, 1995; Thomason 2001.

representations of foreign (and Assyrian) peoples through the lifetime of the Late Assyrian state.

An interest in depicting “foreigners” in monumental art can be seen at least as far back as the third millennium BCE, on the well-known stele of Naram-Sin (see Eppihimer, this volume, Fig. 1; see Winter 1999 for study). But despite the groundbreaking nature of this monument, we see little to no further development of this motif in the royal or state art for the next millennium and a half (Winter 1999: 68). This situation changes dramatically in the reign of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE). Here we see an effort to distinguish the different settings and people involved in different campaigns; indeed, as I show below, this increasingly becomes one of the main concerns of the Assyrian state art. Geographical details abound: trees, an important signifier of place seen on the Naram-Sin stele (Winter 1999), return, in a variety of forms; some of the cities targeted by the Assyrian army are on rivers, while others are not; different areas have different types of booty or materials that they offer as tribute; and the various peoples subject to Assyrian power have diverse characteristics, such as clothing and other features of personal appearance. Fig. 1 shows most of these various elements together. In the top register, Assyrian archers fire arrows at enemies swimming towards their city, seemingly located in the middle of a river; in the bottom, Assyrian soldiers lead away captives, while booty “floats” overhead. Fig. 2, showing a pair of tribute-bearers, provides another instructive view of how differences in people were rendered in the earliest of the Assyrian palace reliefs. A variety of features, mainly of dress and other means of accoutrement, distinguish them from the Assyrians; this technique becomes the standard way that differences in various peoples are denoted. Here, besides the exotic monkeys⁴ they carry, the envoys are set apart by several features whose stereotypical nature allow their origins to be located west of Assyria: for example, their pointy shoes are an allusion to the style of the “Hatti” area, part of the territory of the former Hittite kingdom, while their long hair is tied up in the style of bun seen on north Syrian monuments (see, for example, Zincirli relief B/18; Brown 2008: fig. 33).

But though the Assyrian ruling class clearly desired to set their actions within the “real” world, we shouldn’t overestimate the amount of specificity in this early generation of state art. It is possible, and has been done with good (if not entirely secure) results, to draw upon the entirety of the Assyrian artistic corpus, developed over a period of more than two centuries, to identify the various peoples that appear in the art (for example, Wäfler 1975) or to combine the artistic and architectural evidence with the textual descriptions of campaigns to assist in such identifications (carried out in an admirably elegant way in Winter 1983a). But doing so may also obscure how the new visual code that the Assyrian state artisans were only beginning to devise was actually used at that time. And when we look at the official art only from the

⁴ See Antonaccio 2010: 42 on the importance of exotic goods in the fashioning of elite self-identity.



Figure 1: Slab B-17a–b from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. Top register: Assyrian soldiers fire arrows at swimming enemies; bottom register: procession of captured enemies with “floating” tribute. BM 124538 + 124539; photo courtesy of the British Museum.

reign of Assurnasirpal, we can also see how lacking in specificity it is in important respects.⁵

For example, Winter has suggested (1983a: 22) that the scene depicted in Fig. 1 took place at Karkemish, based on the presence of floats used by the figures in the relief’s top register and the tribute of ivory in the lower register, and the appearance of a seemingly comparable episode in the texts. Yet ivory was a common item of tribute

⁵ Earlier work, prior to the painstaking efforts of Winter, Wäfler, Reade and others to identify particular peoples, places, and campaigns, recognized these difficulties. For example, Barnett (1960: 11) stated that it is “far from clear” which geographic region or peoples Assurnasirpal attacks on his reliefs, adding that the details of dress of non-Assyrians were “vague and unspecific.” See also Barnett and Falkner 1962: 40; Reade 1979b: 31; Russell 1999: 60–61.

from the west (see the comments of Marcus 1995: 197), other scenes from the reign of Assurnasirpal also show floats (for example, on Slabs B9b and 10b; see relief details in Collins 2008: 42–45), and the main iconographic element, the city in the water, could also describe two other towns, Anat and Arwad, as Winter notes (1983a: 22);⁶ this doesn't even take into account the possibility that we see an attack that was not recorded in the inscriptions. To take another example, mountains and hills, which are an important part of the inscriptions of Assurnasirpal and which become an omnipresent motif in the later Assyrian art, are virtually absent in this monarch's artwork, even in some scenes that, based on possible textual correspondences, would seem to require them.⁷

And, most interesting for our purposes here, if we look closely at the individuals identified as non-Assyrians or foreigners, we are confronted with what is perhaps a strange observation: they all look rather "Assyrian." This can be seen quite well when we compare the two tribute-bearers in Fig. 2 to what we might consider bearers of "true Assyrianness," the king and his court (see also Collon 2005: 66). As noted above, several features of these persons' dress, notably the hair bun on the tributary to the right, the cap on the figure to the left, and their upturned shoes, can be related to their geographical origin in the west. But a greater number of features look identical to those of the Assyrians who appear at various places in the palace's decorations: their eyes and eyebrows, the scalloped wavy pattern of hair on their foreheads and temples, the beards, with their alternating curly and straight sections, the twists at the ends of their moustaches, earrings, armbands, and their fringed garments closely resemble the same features on various Assyrians (see Fig. 1, bottom). The effect of the "foreign" items, then, is to stereotype, to provide an identification of certain non-Assyrian peoples based on just a few chosen features that were identified with their culture (and that were accordingly contraposed with Assyrian culture), while the basic form of these individuals is largely "Assyrian."⁸

The lack of specificity of non-Assyrians depicted in this manner perhaps became problematic to the Assyrians themselves, because on some of the other artwork of Assurnasirpal (that is, not on the sculpted reliefs), and especially in the reign of his son and successor Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BCE), short inscriptions known as

⁶ Based on his own iconographic analysis, Wäfler (1975: 239–40 and Taf. 24/2) identifies the enemies in the depiction as being from Suhu, which would mean the town itself is Anat.

⁷ Winter (1983a: 22) suggests that the siege scene shown on slabs B5b to B3b may take place in the Kashari mountains. Even if we decide that a better candidate would be the town of Kaprabu (whose attack shares a similar description), it is described as "hovering like a cloud in the sky" (RIMA 1, A.O.101.1 iii l. 51) and thus should be shown in a mountainous terrain.

⁸ For example, the captives shown in the bottom register of Fig. 1 (see detail in Collins 2008: 38), especially the one on the left, look almost identical to the Assyrians in terms of hairstyle, beard, and robe – only their headbands distinguish them. In another scene, an Assyrian soldier wears clothing with a motif (a step pattern) that is identical to the foreign women he is leading away (see Collins 2008: 48–49).

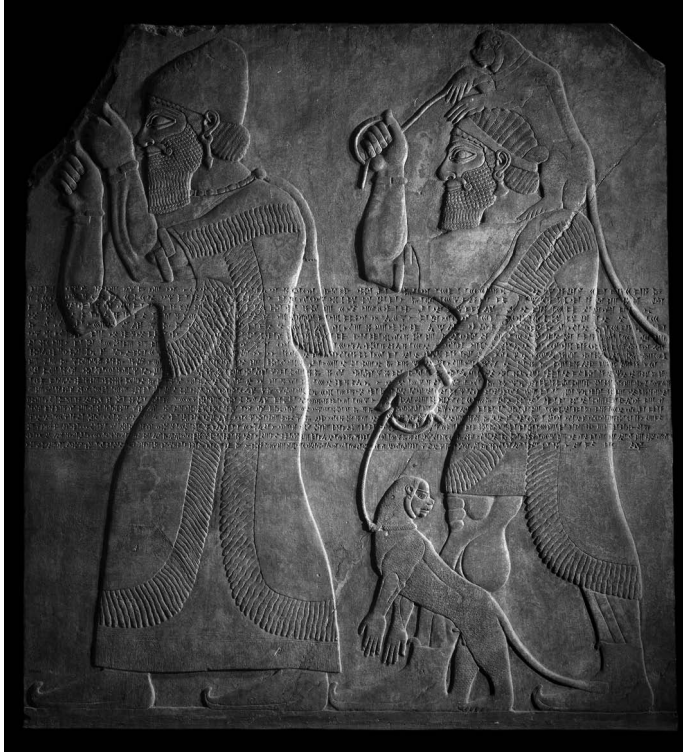


Figure 2: Relief from the throneroom façade of the Northwest Palace showing tributaries with exotic gifts. Though a few highly stereotypical details identify them as coming from the West, their appearance as a whole is rather “Assyrian.” BM 124562; photo courtesy of the British Museum.

epigraphs began appearing to more clearly distinguish non-Assyrian peoples (Russell 1999: 60, 97; see Gerardi 1988 for general discussion of epigraphs). These clearly identify non-Assyrian peoples on both of Shalmaneser’s main monuments, the Black Obelisk and the bronze Balawat gate bands (for the latter, see Schachner 2007). However, the actual depictions of foreign peoples in Shalmaneser’s depictions often still leave room for confusion and misidentification – as Reade notes (1979: 65; see also Schachner 2007: 197), the enemies in some of the battle scenes still look rather “Assyrian,” giving a perhaps mistaken impression that Assyrians are fighting Assyrians (on this possibility, see below).

After the reign of Shalmaneser, there is, according to the surviving evidence, a hiatus in the depiction of foreigners in monumental format until the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 745–722 BCE), when we again see large-scale production and display of reliefs in palaces. The situation presented in this artwork, appearing about a century after that of Assurnasirpal and Shalmaneser, is strikingly different. As Barnett and

Falkner recognized a half-century ago (1962: 40–42), it is at this time that we begin to see greater care taken to differentiate peoples, not only on the basis of isolated and stereotypical components of their clothing, but also in terms of their geography, material culture and even belief systems. Some enemies appear on camels, for example, wearing only short skirts, and sporting short beards and long straight hair (Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. XIV), a combination of elements that not only distinguish them clearly from the Assyrians, but other non-Assyrians as well. Palm trees, laden with fruit, appear to mark a campaign in Babylon (see, for example, Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. IV), which is differentiated from operations in hilly areas (Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pls. XXXVIII, LI). Remarkably, in at least one instance, difference in religious practices is marked by the presence of statues of gods being carried away by the Assyrian army (Barnett and Falkner 1962: XCII, XCIII); based on their characteristics, Feldman (2011: 143), probably correctly, identifies them as Syrian deities.⁹ This difference in religious practice is clear when we compare it to a depiction of an Assyrian ceremony, which shows a priest burning incense on a stand in front of two standards inside a military camp (Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. LX). Finally, and importantly, as Reade (1972) and Nadali (2005: 222; see also Dalley 1985) have demonstrated, the Assyrian army is depicted in a more “multi-cultural” or “multi-ethnic” manner. For example, some archers have distinctively “Babylonian” ringleted hair and beards, and they are also marked off from the stereotypical Assyrian soldier by their short tunics (Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. XXXVI).

This development in the official visual language may have recognized clearly for the first time the demographic changes that the state policies of conquest, annexation, deportation and re-settlement had wrought. And all of this effort at specificity – at categorizing and dividing the world up into distinct peoples, even if they were sometimes also presented as being part of the state – was aided by the first use of epigraphs on the reliefs, as opposed to other types of monumental art (Russell 1991: 23; see also Collins 2008: 64).

Yet questions still arise as to the identification of depicted peoples and places. With only three epigraphs surviving (Russell 1991: 23), and many of the cities and peoples depicted in a similar manner, guesswork is frequently involved in identifications. For example, Barnett and Falkner (1962: Pl. XXVI) identify a veiled woman leading camels as being an Arab queen mentioned in Tiglath-pileser’s inscriptions, but we see similarly veiled women leaving a town they elsewhere identify as Babylonian (1962: Pl. VI). Other groups of people lack any real distinguishing characteristics. The people being deported from the town of Astartu (Barnett and Falkner 1962: Pl. LXX) illustrate this well: they wear a rather generic “Western” outfit consisting of

⁹ Though, to anticipate myself slightly, the identity of these deities (and hence the people they belonged to) is not certain – a previous identification had them as Babylonian (Barnett and Falkner 1962: 29), while Barnett and Falkner themselves identify the city in the upper register of this slab as “Phoenician (?)” (1962: Pl. XCI).

floppy hats, fringed robes, and pointy shoes, a combination that is seen elsewhere (for example, on representatives from Gilzanu on the Black Obelisk; Wäfler 1975: Taf. 26). Finally, we might question the geographic specificity provided by one or two palm trees in a relief. Rather than really evoking a landscape, and especially one that is tied to a group identity, we are faced again with what is little more than a stereotypical prop (see the comments of Thomason 2001: 68 and citations).¹⁰ So while Tiglath-pileser's art represents a major increase in differentiating peoples into discrete groups based on multiple characteristics relating to material culture and even shared beliefs, there is still substantial ambiguity in the depictions taken as a whole.

In the reign of Sargon II (722–705 BCE), depictions of non-Assyrian people continue to appear and are increasingly differentiated, both from each other and the official “Assyrian” representatives of the court (see Barnett 1960: 17). The tributaries in both registers on slabs 13–14 in Room 10 of Sargon's palace at Dur Sharrukin/Khorsabad illustrate this well (Albenda 1986: Pl. 29). The people in the upper register are marked by “snail-shell” hats or turbans and are usually shown with short beards and short ringleted hair, and while they have fringed robes like the Assyrian officials, the patterns of the fringes on the respective garments differ noticeably. The figures in the lower register present a strong contrast to both the people in the upper register and the Assyrians: they wear animal-skin cloaks, laced-up boots, and headbands.¹¹ These both, in turn, differ markedly from some enemies shown fighting the Assyrian army from a city in hilly terrain, who are depicted wearing hoods and long robes (Albenda 1986: Pls. 96–97).

But, for our topic, the most important artistic development in the reign of Sargon was not directly related to the depiction of peoples but rather space. Though most of the reliefs in the palace at Dur Sharrukin followed the traditional register format, with each slab divided into two separate, relatively small strips, a series of reliefs erected in Court VIII allowed for new vistas in representation, employing for the first time a “bird's-eye” view of a deep spatial field (Russell 1991: 198–202; see also Barnett 1960: 19). In the reliefs from Court VIII, we see a group of workers and

¹⁰ Jacoby (1991) makes a similar point about many of the cities shown on the reliefs: rather than recording specific details from actual cities, they frequently served to stand as stereotypical foreign sites.

¹¹ Because there are no epigraphs associated with these figures, their geographic origins must remain open. Wäfler (1975: 266–70) plausibly identifies the people in the lower register as representing inhabitants of the Zagros mountains (*Zagrosbewohner*); his identification of the upper-register figures as deriving from Sam'al is less secure but still possible. Despite the fact that we cannot positively identify the geographic origins of these people, the intent to distinguish these different groups is clear. It is possible that the figures, lacking any kind of explicit identification, were intended to represent relatively large geographic areas, which would have in reality been home to numerous different peoples (see Wäfler 1975: 267). In this particular case, we may be looking at an east-west differentiation of peoples, who may also be further distinguished from the Assyrian point of view in terms of less and more “civilized” (see below).

sailors, almost certainly from the Mediterranean coastal areas of Tyre and Sidon, load and transport logs in a fleet of horse-headed ships (see Albenda 1983; for a different interpretation, Linder 1986). The people, as usual by now, are distinguished by dress and other features of appearance. And, as usual, we see clear indications of geographic place – swirls of water, aquatic life, a city on an island (probably Tyre). What is different, however, is that a particular people appear in a specific geography, carrying out a range of activities that, to the Assyrians, specifically marked them out from other peoples: seafaring and handling/transporting wood, perhaps cedars from the hills of Lebanon. Thus, for the first time, the Assyrian state artists represented not just different people or different landscapes, but peoples *in* their own landscapes, each with a wide range of material culture, lifeways and, very often, mannerisms or behaviors that, taken together, allow us to speak cogently of ethnicities on display.

This new format was put to impressive use in the reigns of two of Sargon's successors, Sennacherib and Assurbanipal, in their palaces at the great city of Nineveh.¹² The celebrated relief series depicting the siege of Lachish and its aftermath illustrates the new possibilities resulting from combining both the larger format and the increasingly specific depictions of particular peoples (Fig. 3).¹³ Shown departing from the besieged city and into exile are various groups of individuals, including several families with their belongings in ox-pulled carts and even on camels. The detail is striking: the material culture of the people is indicated by the jugs that a man and his son both hold, as well as the large jars and other implements that are piled in their cart (see detail in Collins 2008: 92); their clothing (hats with earflaps and short tunics on the males, long robes with veils on the females) is unique and distinctive (see below for another example of this use of detail); the rolling hills of the countryside in southern Palestine are indicated by both the stereotypical "scale" motif, as well as undulating groundlines; and the thick and lush vegetation (see Thomason 2001: 84), including grape vines and low trees, serves not only as a further geographic marker, but also to signify the local economy (wine and fruits, perhaps olives and/or figs).¹⁴ This relief series also shows a feature that marks some of the larger groups in Assurbanipal's art (see below), namely the use of distinctive landscape features, here the town of Lachish, as the focal point of the narrative display, with the peoples associated with this place lined up all around it to be deported. This method stresses

¹² Assurbanipal used Sennacherib's palace for a period of time and set up some of his own reliefs there; see Russell 1991: 119–51 for criteria differentiating the two.

¹³ The scene as a whole has been discussed exhaustively, usually from the point of view of warfare or biblical history, and I need not go over this ground again (see, among others, Russell 1991: 202–209; Ussishkin 1990; Ussishkin 2006 and refs.; Jacoby 1991).

¹⁴ Another slab from Sennacherib's palace, whose imagery apparently now exists only in Layard's original drawings, again shows Assyrian soldiers carrying away foreign gods (see Russell 1991: Fig. 35), serving as another reference to the foreign and distinctive belief systems of particular peoples.



Figure 3: A scene from the battle of Lachish (Southwest Palace, Room XXXVI, Slabs 8–9). Great care was taken to represent specific lifeways of the deportees as well as the landscape they are leaving behind. BM 124907 + 124908; photo courtesy of the British Museum.

much more forcefully the link between people and place than, say, showing the aftermath of deportations in a separate, underlying register, as had typically been the case in the art of Assurnasirpal and Tiglath-pileser.

It is in the reign of Assurbanipal (668–624 BCE) that the depiction of other peoples, in a way that draws upon most of the elements of ethnic identification, reaches a particularly sophisticated state. A consideration of two major relief series, one depicting conquest in Babylonia (Fig. 4), the other a campaign in Egypt (Fig. 5), illustrates this well. The central, focal images in the former draw upon a wealth of geographic details to not just denote, but to vividly evoke the landscape of southern Babylonia: a large river, with smaller channels leading off in different directions; tall reeds everywhere; small islands of reeds among the waters that offer shelter to the local residents (see detail in Collins 2008: 138–39); and a bit farther away, on dry land, we see the omnipresent palm trees of southern Mesopotamia, full of fruit (see Reade 1979c: 91). Adjacent reliefs show the people associated with this landscape, as well as various aspects of their material culture, including dress, implements and furniture piled on a cart and, very appropriately considering the presence of the thick reeds, a woven basket in at least one case.¹⁵ And again, the local economy is signified not only through this material culture, but also through the palm trees, the reeds, the herds of domesticated animals like sheep and cows, and the large quantities of fish swimming in the river.

A totally different scene greets us in the depiction of Assurbanipal's campaign to Egypt. The centerpiece of the relief, along with the Nile River, is a city. Despite the fact that foreign towns are often rendered in a generic manner on the Assyrian reliefs (Jacoby 1991; see also Gunter 1982: 111), this Egyptian city is shown with realistic pylon architecture unique to Egypt (see Nadali 2006: 114–15; Collins 2008: 108). Assyrian soldiers lead out a line of prisoners whose physiognomy¹⁶ indicates that they are to be understood as originating from sub-Saharan Africa (they are usually described in the scholarly literature as Nubian; see, for example, Reade 1979a: 334; Collon 2005: 68; Bahrani 2006: 56). They are also marked by high, bald foreheads, while some are further distinguished by single feathers in headbands. Other prisoners

15 Reed baskets also turn up in reliefs dedicated to campaigns in Elam, which has a similar landscape as Babylonia; see Barnett 1976: Pl. XVIII, registers 2–3. They are thus limited to appropriate geographic areas; the inhabitants of other locales are shown using containers like pottery and sacks. The concern for locating objects in appropriate locales is also seen in the texts; see Zaccagnini 1982: 415.

16 It should be noted that there is little evidence that the Assyrian state art divided people into categories based entirely on their biological features (see, for example, Bahrani 2006; Saggs, in Reed 2007: 105–106 and fn. 5). Nevertheless, in addition to the distinctive physiognomic features of the Nubians, there is plenty of evidence that Assyrian artists could manipulate representations of people by drawing on – or inventing – differences based on biology. Though she totally rejects the idea that the Assyrians did such a thing, Bahrani (2006: 57) herself cites the example of Elamites and Urartians being depicted with “stockier proportions” and “larger noses”; also, an earlier text describes the Gutians as having “canine intelligence and monkeys’ features” (Bahrani 2006: 54).

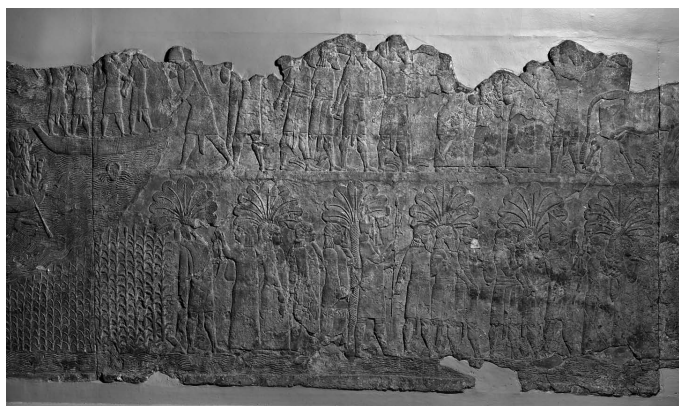


Figure 4: Campaign in the marshes of southern Babylonia, shown on Slabs 2–4 from Room XXVIII, Southwest Palace. BM 124774a–c; photo courtesy of the British Museum.



Figure 5: Slab 17 from Room M, North Palace of Assurbanipal, depicting a campaign in Egypt. BM 124928; photo courtesy of the British Museum.

are characterized, in this case, not so much through their hairstyle and clothing as through their objects *and* the way in which they are using them: for example, nowhere else do we see people, to my knowledge, shown carrying containers on a pole over their shoulders or pottery jugs on their heads (see detail in Collins 2008: 108–109). Here, a combination of physical appearance, clothing, landscape, and the peculiar use of a distinctive material culture serves both to situate the action and people in a particular locale as well as to clearly distinguish them from other campaigns.

Numerous details like these throughout the reliefs of Assurbanipal's reign went beyond merely differentiating people, instead categorizing them in ways that draw upon a cluster of definitive identifying features. The Assyrian state artists included specifics not only of dress, but other aspects of the material culture, and tied them closely into the home landscapes and social practices of the various conquered peoples. We see reed boats, for example, in marshy or riverine areas (in southern Babylonia and Elam; Barnett 1976: pls. XXVIII and XXII), which contrast both with the flat-bottomed boats with horse-headed prows in the Phoenician areas and the tub-like boats that ferried goods on the upper reaches of the Tigris. And there was even a concern for the activities of everyday life that set people apart, in strong contrast to the usual situation in the texts (Zaccagnini 1982: 414, 418). In several instances, Assyrian artists chose to depict people preparing and eating food (Fig. 6), a common means of ethnic differentiation. Finally, as mentioned above, the depiction of rows of



Figure 6: Relief fragment from Room V¹/T¹, North Palace of Assurbanipal, showing Elamite captives eating food. Louvre AO 19913; photo courtesy of the Louvre.

deportees/captives in close association with the landscape, which serves as a compositional centerpiece, acts to emphasize the connection between particular peoples with specific landscapes.¹⁷

Discussion: Creating Ethnic Groups in the Assyrian State Art

As shown above, we can chart a clear development in the depiction of other peoples in the state art of Assyria from the reigns of Assurnasirpal II in the mid-ninth century to Assurbanipal in the mid-seventh century. The earlier depictions are characterized by a rather “Assyrian” appearance – as if Assyrians themselves had dressed up in outfits consisting of a few stereotypical items to stand in for foreign people, in scenes where the landscape is connoted by one or two stock elements (several trees, a river, rarely mountains). In contrast, by the end of the Assyrian empire, representations of non-Assyrian peoples include numerous features that differentiate groups, which are depicted in a variety of domains, including the landscape of the homeland, dress,

¹⁷ Other examples of this technique can be seen in reliefs showing a campaign in southern Babylonia or Elam (Barnett 1976: pl. LX) and against the town of Hamanu (Barnett 1976: pls. XVI–XIX and B).

vessels and other implements, and even mannerisms/behavior; there are sometimes hints at recognition of other key differences that can often be tied into ethnic differentiation, like foodways and religious beliefs.¹⁸ But why do we see this development at all? I would like to suggest that it is related in part to changing needs in the Assyrian state's categorization of other, foreign peoples (as well as ethnic Assyrians and/or other subjects of the crown).

First, we should dispense with the idea that the Assyrian state's visual culture had any *necessary* relationship to "reality." Artists, employed by the state, selected and rendered specific details from the real world but not in a neutral way;¹⁹ rather, they were presented to fulfill specific purposes, political and otherwise (see also Cifarelli 1998: 211–12). Thus, to begin with the images of non-Assyrian enemies from the reign of Assurnasirpal, we should leave aside explanations appealing to "realism"²⁰ in the first instance and look a little deeper at why the Assyrian state artists decided to represent them in such an "Assyrian" way – that is, why they wanted to stress similarities rather than differences.

Although definite answers are not possible, a consideration of visual evidence and other historical data can provide us with an understanding of the dynamics at work. One possibility is that, from the Assyrian perspective, many of the early enemies that the Assyrian state faced as it began expanding in the late tenth and early ninth centuries BCE actually were "Assyrian." As has been recognized (see, for example, Liverani 2004), the Assyrian kings at this time sought to "recreate" the state that existed (or was presented in the inscriptions as having existed) in the preceding

18 It is true that we do not see depictions of one of the most important aspects of ethnic identification, namely the concept of a shared history and descent (though a straightforward depiction of such concepts seems difficult). While we do see indications of the importance of ancestors in the art (for example, Assyrian soldiers forcing captives to grind the bones of their ancestors; Collins, this volume), this is probably to be understood in terms of family and not *ethnos*. Nevertheless, in view of the cultural specificity of the various Near Eastern creation myths, in which the origins of humans and their close relations to particular geographies and lifeways play important roles (as in the creation story in the Atrahasis myth, where the humans are created to dig and maintain the canals of southern Mesopotamia – see Lambert and Millard 1969 for text and translation), I would suggest that the depiction of separate religious practices may be taken, in part, to represent shared history and descent. Furthermore, it is the performance of the activities portrayed in the reliefs, as well as the very act of representing them, that helps create a "shared history."

19 This should not be understood as implying that the creation of the art was entirely the result of conscious decisions; unconscious recreation of the larger society's accumulated semiotic work (cf. Rossi-Landi 1990: 109–12), such as style, should be allowed for. Nevertheless, the context of the creation and display of these images indicates a high degree of conscious direction.

20 Such as seen, for example, in Collon (2005: 66), who writes that the strong similarity between the Assyrians and enemies originating from adjacent areas is due to the fact that "Assyrians, Aramaeans and Semitic inhabitants of the Levant were ethnically related." If denoting difference were the goal, it is easy to imagine that Assyria's enemies might have been rendered in any number of ways; Assyrian artists were not bound to show how things and people "really looked."

Middle Assyrian period. And in fact, during this earlier period, many Assyrians had been moved by the state into conquered areas (the Syrian Jazirah, the Upper Habur and Upper Tigris basins, and around the area of Dur Katlimmu, on the Lower Habur) as administrators and farmers. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Brown 2013), there are various indications that the Assyrian communities in these areas may have undergone changes in their own self-identification, particularly after the Assyrian state withdrew from the more distant regions, notably the Upper Tigris, while in other areas, especially in the Habur basin, an ethnic identification of Assyrian probably remained, although allegiance to the crown was renounced or downplayed. Whether or not the peoples in the region of Suhi, for example (possibly seen in Fig. 1), saw themselves as Assyrian is not important from this perspective; rather, their appearance in the art in such a manner was a means of categorizing them as being actually Assyrian,²¹ or Assyrian enough, in order to facilitate their (re)incorporation into the Assyrian state.

For other peoples, notably those from Karkemish and elsewhere in the north Syrian area, who probably did not have a historic or ethnic connection to Assyria but rather identified more with the culture(s) of the old Late Bronze Age Hittite kingdom, other explanations might be considered. Despite early analyses of Assyrian ideology that stressed an official unrelenting hostility to external states and peoples (for example, Liverani's landmark 1979 study; also Zaccagnini 1982: 410–11), there is considerable evidence that this hostility was not evenly spread around the world outside Assyria's borders (see Reade 1979a: 332; Reed 2007) and that, indeed, some areas and peoples were ranked more highly than others. The case of Assyria's respect for Babylonian culture has long been recognized in the literature (see, for example, Van De Mieroop 2003; Bunnens 2006 and literature), but it is increasingly apparent that the north Syrian area was held in a similarly high regard in the Assyrian imagination (see Brown 2008 for discussion and references). The monumental architecture of the cities of this region served as the inspiration for the adoption of both the reliefs and royal gardens associated with palaces (Winter 1982); some iconographic elements perhaps influenced major decorative choices of the Northwest Palace (Brown 2010); and their monumental buildings may have also served as the source for the new "suite" architecture of Late Assyrian-period palaces (Brown 2008: 218–20; Kertai, this volume). The city of Karkemish seems to have been particularly important for Assyrian thought in this respect (Winter 1983b). Thus, the decision of the Assyrian state artists to show north Syrian peoples as very similar to Assyrians, despite what seems to us as a marked difference in history (as indicated by the frequent scholarly term "Neo-Hittite" to describe the north Syrian area), may indicate an effort at complementarity, or establishing a field to allow for interethnic interaction to take place (Eriksen

21 As I have also suggested (Brown 2013), the motif of the "enfeebled Assyrian," which appears in some of the royal inscriptions from the late tenth-early ninth centuries and describes Assyrians who had supposedly become hungry and gone into other lands or up into the mountains, may be a textual reflection of this scenario.

2010: 34; see also Karp and Kratz 2000: 198). In the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, this interaction would actually be more like assimilation, as I argue below.

The idea that some peoples were considered higher in an implicit hierarchy (see also Bahrani 2006: 56–57) is supported when we look at the peoples who occupied the lower levels of this proposed pyramid. Cifarelli (1998: 224–25) argues persuasively that some scenes in the art of Assurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III contain indications that the peoples depicted were considered less “civilized” than the Assyrians, including their dress, or lack thereof, posture, behavior (running around aimlessly and with limbs going in all directions) and, importantly, their location in mountains (again, one of the few times this motif appears in this early art) rather than in a city. In the art of the seventh century BCE, from the reign of Assurbanipal, we see an even more forceful expression of a people held in low regard, this time the pastoralist peoples who lived in the open steppes adjacent to Mesopotamia, usually identified in the scholarly literature as Arabs (Fig. 7). The men, shown in battle riding camels, are nearly naked, wearing only short skirts, and again are depicted in demeaning postures, with arms flailing. Remarkably, for Assyrian art, Arab women are shown being attacked and even killed by Assyrian soldiers in a camp (Reade 1998: 227 and his figs. 5–6), indicated by stick-frame tents. And, in strong contrast to other campaign scenes from the reign of Assurbanipal, there is no organizing central landscape or cityscape element comparable to those involving other peoples (Babylonians, Egyptians, Elamites); the battles against the Arab people seem to take place in a void, perhaps reflecting the low opinion of the Assyrians about the steppe as an empty and desolate place.²² Only the tents and some palm trees (perhaps symbolizing the Arab existence at the edge of “civilization”) break up this featureless depiction.

Integration of textual evidence with the visual corpus yields a more complete and rounded picture of this development in the depiction of ethnic groups. In the first two centuries of the Late Assyrian period, between the reigns of Assurnasirpal II and Sargon II, one of the main phrases used in the political speech of the royal inscriptions to describe the Assyrian conquest of foreign peoples – or, more accurately, the aftermath of such conquest – was to “count them with the people of Assyria” (*ana/itti nišē māṭ aššur^{ki} manū*) (Machinist 1993: 86–87, 92–93). The integrative aspect of this phraseology is clear, and it is tempting to connect it with the rendering of non-Assyrians in the reigns of Assurnasirpal and Shalmaneser, and also in part Tiglath-pileser III, in a very “Assyrian” way. But, as with the images of the “Assyrianized” non-Assyrians, the inscriptions too seem to extend this “privilege” only to certain favored populations. Assurnasirpal II, in his records about the rebuilding of Kalhu (see, for example, RIMA 1, A.O.101.2, l. 53–55), specifically lists the (formerly) foreign people he settled therein as originating from Suhu, Laqu, Sirqu, Zamua, Bit-Adini, Hatti, and Patina – areas which match up well with those whose inhabitants are

²² For the Mesopotamian antecedents of this viewpoint, see Pongratz-Leisten 2001.



Figure 7: Campaign against Arab people, Slabs 11-12 from Room L, North Palace. BM 124925 + 124926; photo courtesy of the British Museum.

shown in an “Assyrian” manner. Some of the inscriptions from the reign of Shalmaneser III also refer mainly to the same areas when using the phrase “to count (conquered foreigners) with the people of Assyria” (see, for example, RIMA 2, A.O.102.5). Thus, both images and texts from the earlier period of the Late Assyrian state seem geared towards complementarization – but with only certain ethnic groups favored in this way.

This kind of political idiom virtually disappears once we get to the reign of Sargon II, where it is replaced more frequently by the statement that conquered peoples are “count[ed] as captives/booty” (*šallatiš/ana šallati manû*) (Machinist 1993: 93). As argued above, it is in the reign of Sargon, and especially his immediate successor Sennacherib, that we see the explosion in depictions of carefully differentiated peoples. Thus, on the one hand, from the textual perspective we see a demeaning characterization of conquered peoples as “booty,” while on the other, from the visual point of view, there is a noticeably greater effort to distinguish different peoples by ethnic markers, especially realistic geographies. These differing approaches to categorizing peoples can also be explained in terms of ethnicity. Large-scale demographic changes had occurred within the Assyrian state between the ninth and the end of the eighth centuries BCE, due to the massive deportations and resettlements that were a regular feature of state policy (see Oded 1979). Although the Assyrian ruling class as a whole had by this time become a multi-ethnic/multicultural group (Parpola 2007; Machinist 1993: 94; Millard 1983: 106–107), there may nevertheless have been increasing tensions or unresolved conflicts about the role of Assyrian culture (as indicated in Sargon’s rebuke to a subordinate

who had asked to write his reports in Aramaic and demand that he write only in Akkadian – Parpola 1987: xvi). The use of degrading textual terminology to describe “new Assyrians” may have been, as Machinist (1993: 94) explains, a

reaction against an increasing openness in practice to the newcomers in society and administration – an effort ideologically to clarify boundaries between “us” and “them” precisely because the boundaries were dissolving.

This is exactly what the images show as well, with their attention to many distinguishing details:²³ they served to highlight differences, an effort at “dichotomization” or “contrasting,” to help build up group loyalties (Eriksen 2010: 33), in this case to an idealized “Assyrian” identity.

Yet the picture becomes even more complex when we step back from the “them” part of the picture and turn to the “us” part, that is, how “Assyrians” were represented, and it is here that an approach that clearly takes ethnicity into account demonstrates its value. Two examples, both from the reign of Sennacherib, will serve to highlight the complexity of Assyrian identity (at least as the ruling class presented it) in the seventh century BCE. The program of Courtyard VI in the Southwest Palace was devoted to showing activities relating to the quarrying of the building’s bull colossi (see Russell 1991: 94–116 for details); among these activities is forced labor. While most of these workers, based on details of dress, appear to be captives from Sennacherib’s campaigns (Russell 1991: 167), some of them (again, based on dress), look very “Assyrian,” a feature that is especially clear when we consider one scene that shows an overseer admonishing or threatening some workers (see Russell 1991: Fig. 58),²⁴ or another that includes people who resemble Assyrian eunuchs doing menial labor (see Collins 2007: 80). An instructively contrasting image is found in the same palace only two rooms away: it depicts an archer whose dress identifies his geographic origin as the Judean highlands (Russell 1991: 169; Barnett 1960: 19). His presence in a procession of soldiers in the state palace, however, indicates that he is a subject of the Assyrian crown. So here we have, on the one side, “Assyrians” being depicted in subservient roles, while people who are marked with a “foreign” origin are raised to positions of honor.²⁵ Severing the link between state-belonging and ethnic-group

23 It is also in the reign of Sargon that the few instances of what Zaccagnini (1982: 412) calls the “ethnographic” descriptions of peoples, highlighting particular aspects that distinguish them from the Assyrians, appear in the state inscriptions.

24 These details are sometimes elided in discussions of these scenes: for example, Barnett *et al.* (1998: 69, 172), who usually use such ethnonyms as “Judean” to describe the laborers, simply call these Assyrian-looking workers “men.”

25 We can easily point to other examples showing a similar dynamic; for example, the destruction of the town of Hamanu is shown to be carried out by a multi-ethnic Assyrian army (Barnett 1976: pl. LXVI, left). See also Nadali 2005 and Reade 1972.

membership²⁶ makes this situation easier to understand: whatever explanation we adopt to explain this scene (for example, that the “Assyrians” depicted were members of a failed uprising against the state; or that they were ethnic Assyrians but subjects of a different state; or even that they were non-Assyrians, both ethnically and politically, and had simply adopted Assyrian fashion), the larger and more important point is that in the state art of the seventh century BCE, being represented as “Assyrian” was not coterminous with occupying positions of authority, nor did a “foreign appearance” preclude being shown as a cog in the state machine.

Conclusion

Although it was destroyed over two and a half millennia ago, the Assyrian empire nevertheless continues to speak to us in the Western world on a variety of subjects. One of these is the visual culture of empire. The state art was only one means through which the Assyrian ruling class conceived of and intervened in the world around it, and not even the most direct, but it provides an especially vivid and, in many respects, accessible way to understand how they shaped their world. As I have argued above, peoples and their cultures take a prime place in the images, presenting a strong contrast and thus a welcome complement to the scant information provided on this specific issue in the texts (see, for example, Zaccagnini 1982; Machinist 1993; Pongratz-Leisten 2001).

We cannot say the representations of different ethnicities either directly created or necessarily accurately reflected ethnicities as they were lived out in the real world. But we can propose that they served to provide categories of understanding and ordering the world (cf. Bourdieu 1994) for the Assyrian ruling class, whose policies – related to the ideologies incorporated into these images – did have very real concrete effects on people, for example, in terms of deportations, resettlements, and general attitudes towards various peoples. If the Assyrian encounter with other

²⁶ We may see a distinction between state-belonging (being a subject of the Assyrian crown) and ethnic group-belonging (ethnicity) in the Akkadian terminology used in the royal inscriptions. More research on this specific point is needed, and I propose this tentatively, but among the various terms used in political discourse (see Machinist 1983: 81–82), the terms “son of GN” (as in *mār māt aššur^{ki}*, “son of Assur”) and the gentilic (for example, *aššurayyu*, “Assyrian”) appear. According to Machinist, the two are more-or-less interchangeable, but in light of the fact that the gentilic can also be used to describe inanimate objects like oil (Machinist 1983: 90) or bread (according to Laurie Pearce, personal communication), it seems that it implies more of a cultural, rather than specifically political, connection. Thus, it might be more appropriate for marking someone as a member of a cultural or ethnic group, while the phrase “son of GN,” in light of the widespread use of adoption in ancient Mesopotamia, would be a fitting term to describe political affiliation, especially of an expansive, assimilationist (“adoptive”?) state like the Assyrian empire.

peoples did not have the same characteristics of modern ethnic conflicts, their depictions may nevertheless serve to remind us of the “performative” character of representing ethnic groups, with their creation serving as the basis for operating in the larger society (see Brubaker 2002: 166).

This visual culture changed through the life of the Assyrian empire in tandem with political and social developments. Early depictions of other, “foreign” peoples, from the reigns of Assurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III, and even into the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, present a noticeably “Assyrian” view of them (cf. Reade 1979b: 31). These depictions can be linked to inscriptions stressing an “assimilationist” outlook, of drawing foreign peoples (back) into Assyria and “counting them as Assyrians.” In addition, however, these images, with their stereotypes tied not to specific cities or sites but to larger, vaguely defined geographic regions (Syria and the Levant, Babylonia, and the mid-Euphrates/lower Habur areas, for example), were exactly the kind of thing that indicates an effort to create or categorize distinct groups of people (not necessarily ethnicities at this time) into larger units. This may be tied to the need for simplified imperial administration, but such a process of extending identities to cover formerly discrete groups of people is similar to one of the ways in which ethnicities may form (cf. Eriksen 2010: 82–83). But peoples may often resist such heavy-handed, top-down and imperialist methods, and we have evidence that some groups did this, in the process forming their own identities. One good example of this is provided by the Hebrew bible, which probably began to be codified in the later Late Assyrian period (late eighth-seventh centuries BCE) and one of whose main themes is the opposition of the Hebrews to the Assyrians; another important dynamic, which is especially noteworthy in the context of the bible’s mythical ancestral account in the Pentateuch, is both difference (dichotimization) and similarity (complementarization) on the part of the protagonists to the Aramaeans.

The official Assyrian images in the later period of the state (late eighth-seventh centuries BCE) seem to indicate a similar dynamic, with their stressing of the differences between various peoples, and by extension, the distinctiveness of the Assyrians themselves. This new visual emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Assyrian culture – an Assyrian ethnicity – was executed in the long-standing official style of the state, itself perhaps a means of maintaining group identity (Feldman 2011), and may have been one way of responding to changes in the demographics of the state over the preceding century and a half, which seemingly put older forms of boundary maintenance under stress (cf. Eriksen 2010: 81). Yet this effort at dichotimization was tempered by the frequent appearance of people from “foreign” cultures who were also clearly subjects of the crown, as well as ethnic Assyrians in demeaning or menial roles – indicating, maybe for the first time in the art of the ancient Near East, a clear and conscious distinction between state-belonging and ethnicity.

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V. Religion, Ritual and Politics

Claudia E. Suter

Human, Divine or Both? The Uruk Vase and the Problem of Ambiguity in Early Mesopotamian Visual Arts

Abstract: Early Mesopotamian images are several millennia removed in time from us. Their interpretation poses numerous difficulties, beginning with the identification of the represented figures. There are ongoing debates about the identity of quite a few anthropomorphic figures depicted on major early Mesopotamian monuments. They usually revolve around the question of whether the figures represented mortals or deities. Is it reasonable to solve the conundrum by reading ambiguity into the figures? This contribution discusses difficulties of interpretation by re-examining the Uruk Vase as an example of the complexities involved. Moreover, it aims at breaking the reiteration of the prevalent interpretation of this image, which was formulated eighty years ago and rests on a scholarly construct.

Keywords: Uruk Vase, visual imagery, identities, ambiguity, polysemy, royal ideology, deities

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Introduction: On Decoding Early Mesopotamian Figurative Images

As a result of the meteoric advancements in electronics and telecommunications, public media and personal devices are flooding us with images. Academia has reacted to this with a renewed interest in their analysis, not only in art history, but also in philosophy, cognitive science, and other social sciences. Both the ubiquity of images and their study has variously been called the pictorial, iconic or visualistic turn from the preceding centuries dominated by the word. This view, however, results from the perspective of fields that deal mainly with present time and recent history.¹ In my opinion, images played an equally important, if not more important, role in the consciousness of societies in which literacy was restricted to the ruling elite, even if, and perhaps because, they were much more limited in quantity and dispersion.

¹ See also Mitchell (2005: 336–55) for a critique of the term he coined himself.

Despite the intensive study of images, no rigorous, stringent methods for their analysis, comparable to those applied to texts, have been developed. In this respect, images seem to escape us. In part this may be due to their uncanny nature (for example, Mitchell 2005; Boehm 2007), and in part to the large diversity of visual situations, which resists a general method.

Research on Mesopotamian images has been largely empirical, which is not surprising in view of the fragmentary nature of the surviving visual arts and their remoteness in time. Moreover, Mesopotamian images generally do not tell stories in parallel to a text as, for example, the Greek myths and epics for much of Greek and Roman art, the Bible for much of European art or the Thousand and One Nights and similar stories for oriental miniatures.² Although Mesopotamia had its myths and epics, most prominent among them the Gilgamesh cycle, these narratives, known to us through written texts, but to the ancients largely through oral tradition, found only marginal entry into the surviving visual arts (see Sonik, in this volume). Early Mesopotamian exceptions are confined to the extraordinary, yet short-lived Old Akkadian glyptic repertoire:³ they include numerous scenes featuring divine protagonists,⁴ and one capturing the ascension of the legendary king Etana.⁵

What images, then, do we have in Mesopotamia? Practically all visual art is official art commissioned by the king and his entourage and representing the ideology of the ruling class, which was basically royal ideology. The same situation is found in ancient Egypt. Only a small percentage of minor arts, mainly terracotta figurines and plaques, can be viewed as popular art reflecting beliefs of common people. Yet, even these images are to some degree influenced by official ideology (Ornan 2010: 132–33 and n. 72). The Hungarian art historian Arnold Hauser, whose work was dedicated to a social history of art, put it in a nutshell forty years ago (Hauser 1973: 165):

Die altorientalische Kunst beschränkte sich, ausser der Hausindustrie, die im grossen und ganzen noch in der neolithischen Art betrieben wurde, auf die Herstellung von Weihgaben an die Götter und Denkmäler für die Könige, Requisiten des Götter- und Herrscherkults, Monumenten, die dem

² Similarly, Winter 1985: 4.

³ The only comprehensive compilation remains Boehmer 1965.

⁴ Although the interactions of individualized deities remain largely unidentified, I still think that most of them depict mythic stories (Suter 2000: 7–12). See also below.

⁵ Green 1997: 135–37. Following a suggestion by Collon, Green (1997: 139, n. 32) considers a seal image depicting two male figures killing a god to be a possible forerunner of the killing of Huwawa, which is one of the two scenes that picture a Gilgamesh story in 2nd and 1st millennium BCE imagery. In contrast to the Etana scenes, however, this is an isolated image, and while it shares its composition with the later images that depict the killing of Huwawa, the god being killed lacks the idiosyncratic features that identify Huwawa in the later images. Some contributions to the recent volume on the depiction of Gilgamesh stories attempt to identify additional episodes of the cycle in imagery (Steymans 2010: 9–22). I continue to share the view of Andrew George (2003: 100–101) that only the killing of Huwawa and that of the Bull of Heaven hold up to the evidence, and that there is no evidence for the Gilgamesh cycle before the Ur III period (George 2003: 4–6).

Ruhm der Unsterblichen oder den Nachruhm ihrer irdischen Vertreter gewidmet waren, ohne vom Prestige der Gerühmten etwas auf die Ruhmspender fallen zu lassen.

The ideology of those in power promoted the view that kingship was the very basis of civilization and thus the king is the protagonist in official art.

There are several clues for identifying anthropomorphic figures. First and foremost among them are texts inscribed on image-bearing media, such as statues, stone reliefs, and cylinder seals. Occasional label inscriptions identify individual figures by name, while dedicatory and owner inscriptions provide other, less direct clues. In some cases, archaeological context can help to name a god or a king. Based on comparison with figures identified by an inscription, identical or similar figures can then be identified on anonymous images. Understanding the meaning of narrative images further requires knowledge of the function and communicative context of the image-bearing object, of the largest possible collection of similar images, and of the cultural background that underlay the image, which normally relies on information deduced from contemporary texts.

These empirical steps of analysis, however, are not fully sufficient. Images may seem more immediate than texts, especially if they are realistic, that is, figurative, in mode, as is the case for Mesopotamia. Yet they have their own discourse. What we see depicted does not represent real life, history or written literature in a one-to-one correspondence (Ross 2005). Visual images do not simply illustrate, but transmit messages in their own right. They have their own discourse when they depict stories in parallel to a text as, for example, Greek myths (for example, Junker 2005), and even more so when they relate to royal ideology as in Mesopotamia (for example, Suter 2000) and Egypt (for example, Davis 1989). This point, which is self-evident to art historians, cannot be emphasized enough, since it is often ignored in relation to Mesopotamian images, which hampers their interpretation.

On the other hand, the discourse inherent in visual images should not lead us into overrating their particularity and reading speculative symbolisms into them. To give an example: in the above mentioned Old Akkadian seal images featuring interactions of deities Pierre Amiet (1980) proposed to see representations of religious or cosmological concepts rather than myths. His rejection of taking myths into account was a reaction to earlier scholarship, which had relied on myths that were known in writing only several hundred or even a thousand years later than the images in question. In the meantime, however, a substantial sample of Early Dynastic mythical texts has surfaced.⁶ Consequently, there is no need to resort to concepts independent of a text for the interpretation of these images, which is not to deny that myths reflect upon

⁶ On literature of the Early Dynastic period, see Krebernik 1998: 317–25; on the so-called Tribute or Archaic Word List C, which Englund (1998: 99–102) classifies as the “earliest work of written literature on earth,” see Civil 2013; on early Semitic literature and its possible relation to Old Akkadian glyptic, Steinkeller 1992.

religious or cosmological concepts. I am inclined to ascribe the difficulties we continue to have in decoding Old Akkadian seal images featuring divine protagonists mainly to our inevitable ignorance of oral literature.⁷

To deny any relation between images and texts throws us back into a situation, in which the interpretation of images is open to unrestrained speculation. Unlike other ancient civilizations, Mesopotamia has a rich written legacy. I find it unwise to scorn this legacy when interpreting its images, since texts and images of the same culture are bound to reflect upon the same myths, historical events, and ideologies, even if they do so in their own way.

A more extreme example of taking the images' discourse in a wrong direction is Catherine Breniquet's study (2008) on weaving in late 4th to mid 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia. Without discussing the communicative context of her material, which consists mainly of glyptic, she assumes that this imagery was freely invented by the lapidaries and entirely left up to their imagination, as if they were independent of any institution. While such a premise may apply to products of prehistoric artisan craftwork, it cannot do justice to products of a highly complex state administration. Breniquet's questionable approach inspires her imagination so far as to seeing mental images in them as, for example, a metaphor for the city in the representation of a boat or the social fabric in a patterned, rectangular structure (Breniquet 2008: 372–73). Moreover, in search of pictorial representations of weaving, she often proposes two or more diverging readings for the same scenes; in the scene depicting seated anthropomorphic figures drinking – doubtlessly beer – with a straw from a large communal pot, for example, she proposes to see both a banquet and the stretching of wool by hand as a preparation for dressing distaffs (Breniquet 2008: 279–86). Notwithstanding some thought-provoking ideas, I find neither the metaphorical interpretations nor the postulation of ubiquitous ambiguity or polysemy convincing.

Because ambiguity is taken for granted in contemporary art, it has become a subject of investigation in earlier Western art and also in ancient art.⁸ However, when dealing with ancient civilizations, especially one as far removed as the beginnings of urban Mesopotamia, we have to be careful not to confuse ambiguity or polysemy with our limitations in decoding these images. We are obviously not their intended audience. Roland Barthes (1977: 32–51), who demonstrates so beautifully that images are polysemous by default, also demonstrates how important a knowledge of the intended audience and its cultural background is for decoding the different layers of meaning.

7 Similarly Green 1997: 135.

8 Specialists of Western art are discovering ambiguity in periods antedating the first written treatises on the subject in the 18th century CE, revising the widely spread presumption that visual media can represent only phenomena that are discussed in contemporary texts (Krieger and Mader 2010). From a Mesopotamian point of view, this discovery is not as revolutionary as it may seem to a modern art historian.

Whether anthropomorphic figures represented humans or deities has been debated in a number of major early Mesopotamian images. Examples are the protagonists of the Uruk Vase, the Figure aux Plumes, the largest statues of the hoard from Tell Asmar's Abu-Temple, Early Dynastic foundation figurines, the large figure with the battle net on the Stele of the Vultures, its counterpart on the Sargonic stela top from Susa, and the figure on Naramsin's stela from Pir Hüssein. Recently it has become a trend to read ambiguity into debated figures. But is this really feasible?

The debates over the identity of anthropomorphic figures are related to royal ideology. The examples range from the earliest phase of royal representation in the Late Uruk period into the Old Akkadian period when, according to written evidence, the first of two short periods of divine kingship was initiated. Kingship is universally propagated as something sacred, no doubt to uphold the king's power over his subjects. Several recent studies confirm that this was also the case in Mesopotamia.⁹ Whether the king deified himself or not, he stood above humans and close to gods, whose representative he claimed to be. "The king is not god but partakes of the divine, and is human, but without many of the limitations prototypical of the human being" (Cooper 2008b: 263). This is why the borders between human and divine became fuzzy (Selz 2008). Dead kings ascended to heaven and became godlike heroes. Royal inscriptions and hymns blurred boundaries between gods and kings by mixing myth and ritual, divine and human spheres (for example, Suter, in press).

Images, however, cannot blur boundaries in the same way as texts do. Although they can comprise several layers of meaning, they inevitably have to give shape to individual figures, and there were conventions for the representation of human and divine figures. In an article felicitously titled "in the likeness of man," Tallay Ornan (2009) argues that despite non-anthropomorphic representations in certain periods, the conceptualization of the divine was from the beginning anthropocentric and remained so throughout Mesopotamian history. The anthropomorphic representation of deities is fully developed in Old Akkadian glyptic, which at the same time presents the largest variety of individualized deities in Mesopotamian art. The principal marker that distinguished divine from human figures was the horned crown. This marker of divinity was developed in the last phase of the Early Dynastic period and remained a convention throughout the early Mesopotamian era.¹⁰

Whether deities were represented in anthropomorphic shape before the horned crown was introduced hinges on the interpretation of "history's first narrative representation" as Edith Porada (1995: 134) called the Uruk Vase (Fig. 1). Does the female figure, whom the largely damaged ruler (see below) meets at the entrance of a temple

⁹ Sallaberger 2002; Brisch 2008, with further literature.

¹⁰ Although the horned crown lives on into neo-Babylonian times as a headgear reserved for gods, it does not remain the unique divine headgear that it was in the 3rd millennium; variants of divine crowns, in which the horns become secondary elements, begin to appear in Old Babylonian times, and from Kassite times on deities can wear crowns without horns. For an overview, see Boehmer 1972–75.

or storehouse marked as Inana's by a pair of standards in the shape of the pictogram representing her name in writing, depict the goddess or a human representative of the goddess? In what follows I will scrutinize the Uruk Vase as an example of the complexities involved in interpreting early Mesopotamian images, moving from the identification of its protagonists to the message of the entire monument to later reflections of its imagery.

The Protagonists' Identity

The debate over the identity of the female figure on the Uruk Vase is a long-lived and thorny one.¹¹ A major difficulty lies in the fact that the earliest phase of royal representation predates historical kingship: we neither know any kings by name, nor do we have any written self-representation of them. The Vase is contemporary with the invention of writing, which was mainly used for administrative purposes at that time. Moreover, the image is the most extended visual narrative of its time. The only clues for its interpretation are parallels of motifs in contemporary imagery and in later royal self-representation. Although I will also resort to later material, like all interpreters, it is my ambition to make full use of contemporary imagery whenever possible.

The partly damaged headdress of the female cannot solve our problem with her identity. This headdress apparently was a two-pointed cap similar to the one worn by the female figure on five roughly cut cylinder seals that depict a much abridged version of the same encounter as depicted on the Uruk Vase (Fig. 2).¹² Although it distinguishes this female figure from others, we remain ignorant of what it stood for, since it does not occur with any other figure.

Two recent studies argue that Inana's standards identified the figure as the goddess.¹³ However, a number of observations speak against this proposal. First, the alleged Inana on the Vase and the handful of related seal images would be the only representation of a deity in Late Uruk imagery, and it is unlikely that deities were depicted in images at that time. In a series of detailed studies, Pierre Amiet (1986; 1995; 1997), and recently also Astrid Nunn (2010), have investigated the beginnings in the depiction of deities in Mesopotamia and neighboring Iran. Tracing the relevant

11 In addition to the references in Nunn 2010: 248, n. 35, see also Hansen 1998: 46; 2003: 24; Bahrani 2002; Feldman 2005: 283–87; Braun-Holzinger 2007: 8–10; Asher-Greve 2008: 126–27; Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 190–91; Wiggermann 2011: 663. Of course, this significant image is discussed in countless other works; it also features in several contributions of the just published volume on the Sumerian World edited by Harriet Crawford (2012).

12 For a catalogue and good photographs, see Braun-Holzinger 2007: nos. FS 11–16, 26, pls. 10–11.

13 Braun-Holzinger 2007: 9; Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 192. Note that Braun-Holzinger (2007: 9, n. 7), although she finds it difficult to conceive of a procession headed toward a non-divine figure, does not exclude the possibility that it might be the “chief priestess of Inana.”

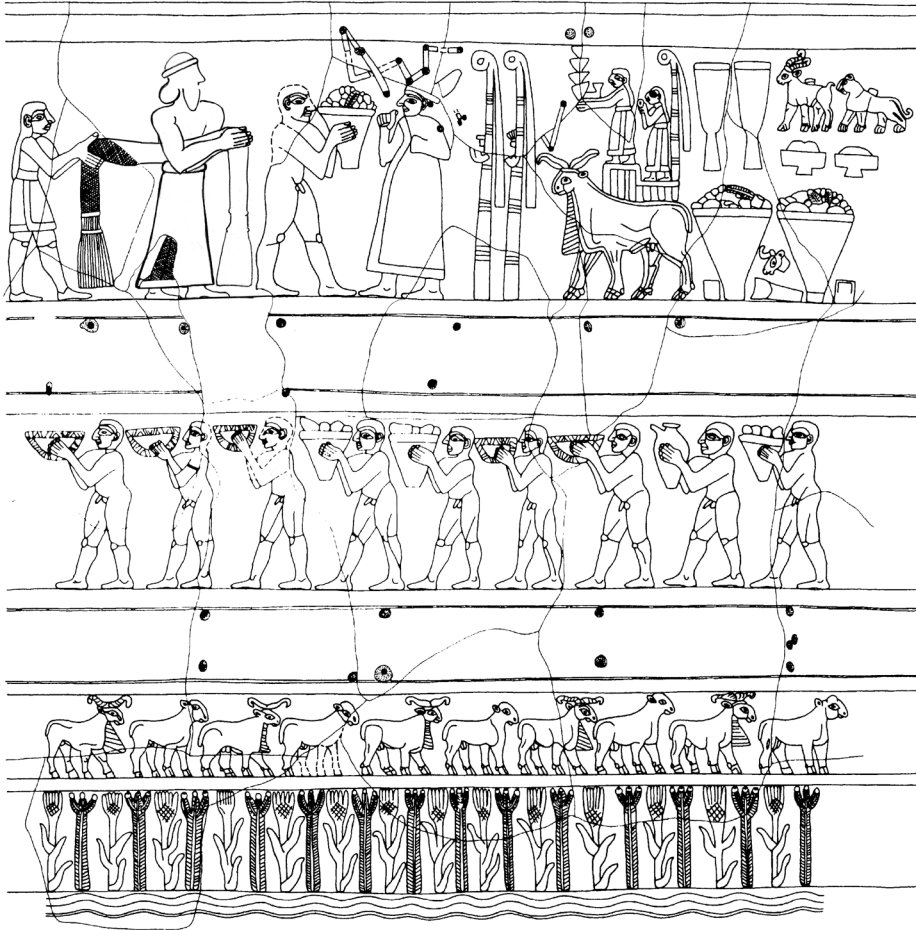


Figure 1: Projection of the relief carved on the Uruk Vase, H: 105 cm. Drawing by author based on Lindemeyer and Martin 1993: pl. 19-25.

visual imagery from Neolithic times up to the full-fledged repertoire of deities in Old Akkadian glyptic, both scholars conclude that representations of deities proper do not appear in imagery until the last phase of the Early Dynastic period. There are no images that can be interpreted as depicting the worship of either anthropomorphic figures or divine symbols before that.¹⁴

The second observation concerns the visual function of the standard that closely resembles Inana's pictogram, even if it is rendered more realistically in images. This

¹⁴ The prehistoric supernatural figures, usually hybrid beings in the role of masters of animals, are best understood as a kind of shaman, as proposed by Edith Porada (1995: 31–33).

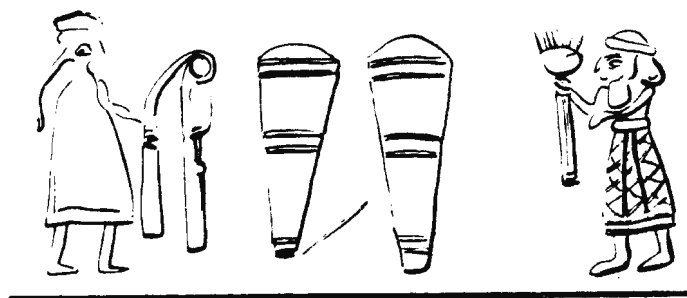


Figure 2: Impression of Late Uruk cylinder seal, H: 3.7 cm. Drawing after Amiet 1980: pl. 45 no. 649.

standard is one of several similar standards that occur in Late Uruk imagery; while depicting an element of reed architecture, they were seemingly associated with different deities.¹⁵ Inana's standard appears, not surprisingly, on objects from Uruk, whose patron deity she was according to later texts. The fact that the same standard can recur repeatedly in the same image – three times, for example, on the Uruk Vase – speaks against the interpretation of reed standards as icons of the respective deity in symbolic form; an individual major deity does not recur repeatedly in the same scene. Furthermore, the various contexts in which reed standards are depicted also speak against the interpretation as an attribute identifying an anthropomorphic figure associated with it, since reed standards occur more often without than with an associated anthropomorphic figure. They are flanking a building or marking its entrance as with the pair on the Uruk Vase; one or several standards of the same type can be attached to a pen surrounded by livestock or occur in scenes depicting livestock without a pen; one or two standards occur on a stepped structure atop an animal statue as with the third standard on the Uruk Vase; Inana's standard only is touched by the same female as the one depicted on the Uruk Vase in the few abridged versions of the scene in glyptic. In his analysis of these contexts, Amiet (1986: 30–33; 1995: 491) concludes that the function of reed standards was to delimit sacred space. While I generally agree with his interpretation, I would slightly shift the emphasis and interpret reed standards as markers of numinosity: they flagged the presence of the respective deity whether it was in a particular place, object or person. This function of reed standards precludes that the female on the Uruk Vase depicted the goddess.¹⁶

Another argument brought forward by Amiet (1986: 39; 1995: 491–92) and Nunn (2010: 249) for identifying the female as a mortal woman rather than a goddess is that she stands on a par with the damaged ruler. In Mesopotamia, status and rank were

¹⁵ On their interpretation, see Braun-Holzinger 2007: 21–23, with earlier literature.

¹⁶ In Nunn's (2010: 249–50) words, the symbolized does not seem to be represented next to its symbol in Uruk imagery. Similarly, also Amiet 1997: 324 and Cooper 2008a: 73, n. 28.

expressed not only in the figure's attire and its position in the image, but also in its size relative to other figures. Deities are generally larger in size than humans, kings larger than their subordinates, etc. This is also the case on the Uruk Vase: the servant behind the ruler is smaller than the carrier in front of him, and the latter is taller than the other carriers in the register below; hierarchy of size can also be observed in Late Uruk seal images. Yet, the female's head is at the same level as that of the nude carrier facing her, who was no doubt lower in rank than the elaborately dressed ruler. Another convention in Mesopotamian art is that figurative representation tends to fill the image field from bottom to top; the Uruk Vase is no exception. Since the ruler's headband did not take extra space in contrast to the two-pointed cap of the female, he must have been noticeably larger than her.¹⁷

Additional details seem to imply that the lost ruler was of higher rank than the female: his garment is patterned in contrast to the plain one of the female and thus presumably more precious. He is accompanied by two subjects, a clearly smaller servant following behind him and the carrier preceding him, while the female stands alone in front of the pair of Inana's standards. It is unfortunate that her hand gesture is without parallel in Uruk imagery. In later periods, however, this position of the arm with the hand by the nose expressed reverence toward a superior – whether human or divine – that the person in question approaches, while the right arm of deities stretched out toward approaching humans is clearly at a wider angle and thus a different gesture (Suter 2000: 260–61). One last detail that speaks for a mortal woman is the dress, which looks similar to that of many Early Dynastic women (Strommenger 1971: 46).

After having brought forward these arguments in favor of identifying the female as a mortal woman, probably inferior in rank to the ruler, and before moving to the ruler himself, it should be said that this woman stands out as another protagonist by being placed in the center of the upmost register facing the procession, and by her association with Inana. At the same time, Inana's sacred space is given much more room than the female; it takes up half of the register, next to which the female appears less prominent. One might ask, therefore, whether it was not Inana's sacred space rather than the female that was the focal point of the composition, to which the procession stretching over several registers is directed.

Based on the remaining piece of garment, together with its prominence in this most expanded narrative of the period, the damaged protagonist of the Uruk Vase can be reconstructed as the most distinguished figure in Late Uruk imagery.¹⁸ Three unique features distinguish this figure from all other figures: the beard, the bulgy

¹⁷ I have reconstructed him taller and more muscular than Wiggermann (2011: 664, fig. 31.1), who sees Inana in the female (see below). For the same reason, he must have reconstructed her headgear touching the upper frame, although the preserved corner is clearly lower than Inana's standards next to it.

¹⁸ On this figure, see Braun-Holzinger 2007: 7–32, pls. 1–15.

hair, which may have been tucked up in the neck, and the headband or circlet. Moreover, it stands out in size and often also by its patterned kilt, although the latter was neither indispensable nor exclusive to it. This figure appears in contexts in which its role corresponds to that of kings identified by texts in later images. In fact, much of the early Mesopotamian royal image was conceived at this time. Since this was a phase of invention and experimentation, we should not be surprised to find a larger and more varied repertoire of royal images than in later periods. The Late Uruk ruler is the only early Mesopotamian king who is shown hunting beasts of prey, and his role as provider finds more varied expressions than in later periods (Suter 2012a). Denise Schmandt-Besserat (1993) has pointed out the superhuman qualities in his depiction and the contribution of his images to the process of state formation.

Although there is no direct evidence and some arguments are based on Early Dynastic texts, the Uruk ruler figure has plausibly been identified with EN, who was the head of the Late Uruk administration.¹⁹ What this figure and EN have in common is their prominence in image or text, respectively. EN is the word most frequently attested to in the Uruk IV-III text corpus, more than twice as often as the next most frequent word, which is ŠE for barley (Englund 1998: 70). That EN does not occur in the Late Uruk profession list confirms his status beyond all officials of the administration.²⁰

Both EN and his visual counterpart have been interpreted as “priest-king.” I do not find either interpretation tenable.²¹ That of the EN relies in part on the backward projection of the later use of the Sumerian term *en* for a “priestly” office,²² but mostly on the interpretation of the ruler figure in Late Uruk imagery. Both Wolfgang Heimpel (1992) and Piotr Steinkeller (1999), who come to different conclusions in their hypothetical reconstructions of the earliest form of Mesopotamian sovereignty, bring the Uruk Vase in as evidence for the thesis that the earliest sovereign was a “priest-king.” Steinkeller (1999: 105, n. 3) admits that his assumption that the office of the Late Uruk EN “combined in equal measure religious *and* politico-military powers ... rests primarily on the evidence of Uruk art.”

The interpretation of the pictorial “priest-king,” in turn, relies on the projection of a “sacred marriage” inferred from much later texts on Late Uruk imagery, and finds this backward projection affirmed in the frequent association of the ruler figure with Inana’s standard. These speculations, to which I will return below, seduced the authors of a recent study into going so far as to suggest that the pictorial “priest-king” represented a god (Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 186–96), a suggestion earlier made

¹⁹ See Steinkeller 1999: 104–11 and Braun-Holzinger 2007: 20, both with further literature.

²⁰ A comparable phenomenon is the absence of royal seals for the kings of Akkad and the Third Dynasty of Ur.

²¹ For another negative assessment, see Michalowski 1997: 100.

²² “Clerical” in the sense of administrative might be a more appropriate term; see Suter 2007: 318–23.

by Elizabeth van Buren (1935), to whom the interpretation of the Uruk Vase as a representation of the “sacred marriage” goes back.

In Late Uruk texts, however, EN occurs solely as a “chief of administration” (Englund 1998: 70). He obviously was the head of the operations for which writing was invented and, by extension, probably the head of this first agrarian state. In images, the ruler is, in contrast to the female, neither directly associated with Inana’s standard, nor is he shown in priestly functions. His concurrences with Inana’s standard are restricted to images that express his role as provider of the Late Uruk state, namely the Uruk Vase, the much abridged versions of this image in glyptic, and a few additional seal images that depict him associated with the cultivation and storage of grain or with animal husbandry; Inana’s standard never occurs in hunt or war scenes.²³

Based on visual conventions deduced from an analysis of Late Uruk imagery, I would argue that the two protagonists of the Uruk Vase represent the ruler and an elite woman linked to Inana. I am consciously not calling her a priestess, since we cannot infer that anybody associated with a deity was necessarily clergy. It has not occurred to anyone to call early Mesopotamian kings of historical periods priests, and yet they claimed to represent the gods vis-à-vis their people and are seen personally performing cultic acts as, for example, pouring a libation to a deity. Our notion of priesthood is imprinted by the institutions of the monotheistic religions that prevail today, whereas in pantheistic Mesopotamia the boundaries between priesthood and officialdom were blurred (Sallaberger and Huber Vuillet 2005). The woman on the Uruk Vase may as well have represented a queen: queens are prominently depicted next to their husbands in the Early Dynastic period (Suter 2012b), and their especially close relationship with Inana is attested to in Ur III texts (Weiershäuser 2008: 180).

The Jars’ Message

Does my interpretation of the two protagonists on the Uruk Vase make sense with regard to the message of the entire monument? The most expanded visual narrative of the Late Uruk state is carved on a footed stone jar measuring about one meter in height. This was not the only exemplar of its kind; a counterpart is evidenced by a fragment (Lindemeyer and Martin 1993: no. 227, pl. 22). Such jars are depicted on the Uruk Vase itself as well as on a few glyptic images, where they are seen in pairs associated with storage jars within Inana’s sacred space (Braun-Holzinger 2007: nos. FS 1, 28–29 on pls. 2, 14–15). Footed jars contrast with storage jars in that they are

²³ Similarly, Braun-Holzinger 2007: 20, n. 46. Marchesi and Marchetti (2011) approach the figure with the wrong premise of an evolution toward an ever more distinguished royal figure, with which the Uruk ruler figure does not accord. Neither the political system nor the royal image were subject to a straightforward evolution.

smaller in size, more sophisticated in form, and lacking any indication of contents. The Uruk Vase and its counterpart show not only that such footed jars were made of a material precious in the southern alluvium and suited for its durability, but also that they could be carved with royal imagery and thus serve the self-representation of the elite. Since they occur within Inana's sacred space, they may have been dedicated to the goddess, like similar gifts of the ensuing Early Dynastic and later periods (Braun-Holzinger 1991). If so, it would be reasonable that their message was likewise addressed to deities, future rulers, and those who had access to Inana's sacred space.

Only a few years after its discovery in the winter of 1933/34, the Uruk Vase's image was interpreted as a depiction of the "sacred marriage" rite.²⁴ This interpretation continues to be reiterated in innumerable works, usually without any arguments in its support as if it were plainly visible. This is not the place for a history of research; suffice it to cite two more recent studies that rely on this interpretation. In an exhibition catalogue, Donald Hansen (1998: 46) wrote: "Whether the female figure is the goddess herself or her representative is unimportant; in an enactment of the drama, the participants become the godhead." Zainab Bahrani (2002) expands on this idea with theories of visual performativity. She discerns three levels of representation (2002: 21): the "sacred marriage" rite enacted by "priestess" and king; the divine marriage in an enactment in which "priestess" and king become doubles of the gods; the depiction of the vase creating a referential circle. In her opinion, we can never determine whether the events depicted a mythological marriage or the performance of a ritual, nor can we determine the identities of the figures, because "the representation required ambiguity," since the "sacred marriage" was "a mimetic performative enactment in one of its guises," "an image that refers to its own imageness," but at the same time "blurs boundaries of the first and second order of representation." She sees the imagery encapsulating "the cyclical nature of fertility through the repetition of forms in an infinite circling of the vase," and "the power of illusion effected through the suspension of the place of the signified."

Still within the frame of a "sacred marriage," Daniel Hockmann (2008) proposes a new layer of meaning. He sees in some of the objects inside Inana's "temple" pictograms representing Sumerian cities – Nippur, Zabalam, Kutha, Uruk – in parallel to the Uruk III city-seal, and proposes that the Uruk Vase represented the exchange relations within this presumed league of cities. According to him, the "sacred marriage" would have provided the ritual frame for the contractually stipulated offerings, the "priest-king" would have been the mediator of the presumed league and representative of Inana's temple, and the vase itself would have been a representation of these obligations, a prototype of later *kudurrus*.

Although the connection with the Uruk III city league is intriguing, I am skeptical. First, while the Uruk Vase forms part of the so-called "Sammelfund" from Eanna III, it

²⁴ See the references in Steinkeller 1999: 104, n. 1, and note 11 above.

may well be an heirloom of level IV (Strommenger 1980: 481) and thus older than the seal impressions attesting to the first city league. Second, in contrast to Egypt, writing never formed an integral part of imagery in Mesopotamia (Cooper 2008a: 75).²⁵ Third, if members of the city league were represented among the objects in Inana's "temple," one wonders why only some objects or parts of them signified cities, while the rest did not represent writing, and why the alleged pictograms were randomly scattered among objects that presumably represented realia. The orderly amassment of objects behind the pair of Inana's standards is better explained as representing goods, both dedicatory gifts and agricultural produce, that were kept or stored in a building associated with the goddess, their doubling standing for plenty.

The interpretation of the Uruk Vase's image as a "sacred marriage" retrojects a hypothetical rite inferred from tendentious texts dating to a thousand years later. The "sacred marriage" thesis is a scholarly construct inspired by Frazer's *Golden Bough*, not only with regard to the Uruk Vase, but also with regard to the texts dating a millennium later (Sweet 1994; Assante 2003: 27–31). As far as the evidence goes, there never was a central festival in 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia that celebrated the marriage of the king to a goddess, nor was there a central New Year's festival (Sallaberger 1993: 310). During this era Mesopotamia was unified only for two short periods under the kings of Akkad and the Third Dynasty of Ur (Michalowski 1987: 46–48), hence the local diversity of cultic calendars. When we have literary evidence for the propagation of an intimate relationship of the king with Inana,²⁶ which is most pronounced under the Ur III kings and their epigones in Isin, that is, at the end of the 3rd and very beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE, there is no evidence for such a festival in the cultic calendar of Uruk (Sallaberger 1993: 314, n. 1421). The king's relationship with Inana parallels his relationship with other deities, while its intimacy corresponds to Inana's aspect as goddess of love (Sallaberger 1999: 155–56).

In some places, most notably in the state of Lagash, but also in Umma, there were festivals celebrating divine weddings in which it is plausible that the respective city patron and his/her consort were juxtaposed to a royal couple; the Lagashite queen was indeed Baba's "priestess."²⁷ This, however, does not necessarily imply that the royal couple acted for the divine couple in a ritual. Ethnographic parallels

25 I agree with Jerry Cooper (2008a: n. 34 and 40) that the interpretations of at least two of the three alleged examples to the contrary by Morenz (2004: 259–62) are "adventurous." Moreover, the authenticity of the seal formerly in the Erlenmeyer Collection is not beyond doubt.

26 For a discussion of the sources see Cooper 1993: 82–95, and in press, with further literature.

27 Sallaberger (1999: 155) infers the juxtaposition from the fact that the deceased Gudea and his wife received offerings during the bridewealth festival of Baba in Girsu. Other theogamies attested in administrative texts are those of Nanshe and Nindara in Nigin (Sallaberger 1993: 285–87), of Dumuzi and Inana of Zabalam in Umma (Sallaberger 1993: 257–64), and possibly also the Tummal festival mentioned below. If Tallay Ornan (2010) is correct in interpreting the motif of a goddess on the lap of a god as referring to a theogamy, then visual evidence would also attest to a theogamy of Nanna and Ningal in Ur.

rather suggest that statues represented the divine couple.²⁸ Theogamies marked the high point of the respective cultic calendars. They were presumably pompous public ceremonies that propagated the cyclical re-establishment of bonds between the people and the gods, thus conjuring continued prosperity, just like other major festivals.²⁹ Again, however, there is no evidence for a theogamy of Inana and Dumuzi in Uruk. Although the hymn *Shulgi X* describes Shulgi's intercourse with Inana in Uruk, this is only one episode on a journey during which the king visits several deities, seeking their blessing. The major festival in the Ur III state apparently was the Tummal festival, which featured a boat procession of Enlil and Ninlil, chief deities of the Sumerian pantheon, from Nippur to Tummal (Sallaberger 1993: 131–45).

Another problem with the presumed “sacred marriage” of Inana and Dumuzi in the Uruk period is that Dumuzi did not yet exist. Manfred Krebernik (2003: 151–53) has shown that Dumuzi was an abbreviated personal name anchored in the Early Dynastic IIIa onomasticon. The same applies to Ama'ushumgal, another name for Dumuzi, and to other characters of the cycle of Dumuzi stories. This led Krebernik to conclude that the Dumuzi cycle originated in the middle or early Early Dynastic period. Based on his findings with regard to the names, together with the occurrence of two antediluvian kings named Dumuzi in the *Sumerian King List*, he further suggests that Dumuzi and Ama'ushumgal represent deified ancestors of different dynasties that were syncretized in later tradition.

If no textual sources plausibly support the “sacred marriage” thesis, does the image carved on the Uruk Vase? Although I would not entirely exclude that the image could have alluded to a wedding celebration, there is no compelling indication that it must have done so, much less one of a king to a goddess. One possible allusion to a wedding celebration may have resided in the combination of a procession of gift or food bearers with an encounter of a heterosexual couple in front of a building. Much later when we have written sources on the subject, wedding celebrations involved a procession in which the groom and his best friend brought gifts, mainly food, to the house of the bride (Greengus 1990). If we can infer from Early Dynastic imagery, however, gift or food processions could be performed on numerous other occasions; they need neither have been exclusive to a wedding celebration nor to a harvest thanksgivings (Selz 2007: 93), but could have formed part of all the diverse celebrations that included a banquet.³⁰ Furthermore, if the female represented the queen, her

²⁸ As Gwendolyn Leick (1994: 130–38) pointed out, the best parallel is the Hindu festival of Madurai, on which see now also Lapinkivi 2004: 183–89.

²⁹ Although Cooper (1993: 90–91), who now (2013) sees a metaphor rather than a ritual in the intimate relationship of the king and Inana, had suggested such a scenario for a “sacred marriage,” it can be applied to theogamy festivals, since the royal couple was presumably juxtaposed to a divine couple. The sumptuousness of cult festivals is confirmed by administrative texts (Sallaberger 1993).

³⁰ On the latter, see Suter 2012b: 215–16.

encounter with the king would have been equally open to an array of different celebrations in which the royal couple participated.

A second possible hint to a wedding celebration might have been the heavy textile partly lost in the break, which is made of the same patterned fabric as the ruler's kilt. Its preserved part ends in a tassel and is supported by the ruler's servant. Frans Wiggermann (2011: 663 with fig. 31.1) reconstructs its other end in the ruler's hands and suggests that it "may be a bedspread, the ruler's gift to the goddess on the occasion of their wedding, or, in cultic terms, on the occasion of the sacred marriage between him and the divine head of state," assuming that "the ruler of Uruk embodied Inana's supernatural husband, the dying and resurrecting god Dumuzi." His interpretation must have been inspired by the bridal song *Dumuzi-Inana A*, which describes the production of a linen fabric step by step up to its use as a bed sheet for Inana and Dumuzi (ETCSL 4.08.01).

However, neither did Dumuzi yet exist, nor does this bridal song reflect a "sacred marriage" between a ruler and Inana.³¹ While I cannot agree with Wiggermann's interpretation, his reconstruction of the textile's lost end in the ruler's hands, earlier proposed by Rainer Czichon (2006: 185 with fig. 2), although in a less convincing form, is the most plausible. The common reconstruction suggesting that the textile was a train of the ruler's kilt is anachronistic: at no time does the motif of a servant carrying his/her superior's train occur in Mesopotamia, nor does the Late Uruk ruler's kilt ever have a train. Moreover, the textile is proportionally far too large to be part of the ruler's kilt. Its identical pattern is better explained with the suggestion that this textile was made of an equally precious fabric as the ruler's garment.

None of the other proposals of what the ruler might have carried or not is convincing. The analogy with the empty-handed gesture of the stone statuette from Uruk (Roaf 1990: 61) is unlikely, because this statuette's position of the hands is identical to that of the ruler feeding Inana's livestock stalks of rosettes (Braun-Holzinger 2007: pl. 14 no. FS 28); the statuette must originally have held a pair of such stalks made of another material, possibly precious metal. That the ruler held a stalk of barley as in the glyptic scene (Jacobsen 1991: 116) is unlikely, since the latter is a drastically abridged version, in which the stalk or sheaf of barley was an indispensable piece of information for the message that the ruler provides surplus grain, whereas the expanded narrative on the Uruk Vase depicts grain and grain products in much more detail so that there was no need for it being carried by the ruler himself. A peg (Strommenger 2008) makes no sense, since pegs were used in rituals that sealed transfers of property (Cooper 2008a: 78).

Textiles were an important component of the economy (Englund 1998: 150–53). Their two main sources of raw material, flax and sheep, are depicted on the Uruk Vase. In addition, there may be an allusion to weaving in the pair of Inana's standards:

31 On bridal songs, see Leick 1994: 64–79; Assante 2003: 30–31; Lapinkivi 2004: 30–45.

Breniquet (2008: 307–13, esp. 311) suggests that the unique and difficult to identify attachments at the height of the female's elbow represent supports for the warp beam of a vertical loom; these attachments may thus have evoked a loom.³² The textile possibly carried by the ruler and his servant may have been a sash for the goddess. Gigantic sashes the size of their human carriers, together with equally gigantic bracelets, are indeed carried toward structures that may be temples on contemporary seal images (for example, Braun-Holzinger 2007: pl. 24 no. FS 24). Garments appear as gifts for gods from the Early Dynastic period on. This interpretation would corroborate Ornan's contention that deities were imagined in anthropomorphic shape from the beginning, even if they were not yet represented in images. Moreover, it would establish a close link between ruler and goddess through the shared patterned fabric.

If the scene carved on the Uruk Vase did not represent a "sacred marriage," what then is being depicted? Based on her analysis of the ruler figure in Late Uruk imagery, Schmandt-Besserat (1993: 18–19) makes two important observations: this figure was "unlike his fellow mortals," and he brought economic prosperity. Along these lines, I see in the Uruk Vase first and foremost an image of Late Uruk economy, social hierarchy, and royal ideology, an image that expressed power relationships. This is corroborated by the above-suggested function of the footed jar as carrier of royal representation. Looking at the imagery of the so-called daily-life scenes on Late Uruk seals within the framework of state formation, Elena Antonova (1992) suggests that the realism of these scenes covers up a new ideological myth about people's destiny, which facilitated social differentiation and hierarchy.³³ In a similar way, the Uruk Vase disguises in the realistic depiction of a procession the new ideology: one single man stands out from all other people due to his relation with the divine world. This is the quintessential message of all subsequent early Mesopotamian royal images.

The Uruk Vase focuses on the provider aspect of the ruler. Due to his special relationship with the goddess, he brings about abundance and prosperity signified by the repetition of crops, livestock, and carriers of goods (Winter 2007). Thus the people depend on him. He is the head of the economy. He continuously brings the fruits of the harvest made possible by the labor of his people to storage, and he will redistribute the surplus later again among his people. That grain storage rather than a wedding was the principal theme, is corroborated by the abridged glyptic images, which reduce the scene to its essentials: the two protagonists are seen walking toward or standing on either side of two large containers, possibly grain silos. While Inana's woman holds her standard, the ruler holds a vegetal object, probably a stalk or sheaf of barley, which may have been thought to be an embodiment of the grain spirit and

³² Contrary to Breniquet, this interpretation cannot be extended to other standards in Uruk imagery, since no other standard, including the third standard on the Uruk Vase, exhibits such an attachment. Cooper's (2008a: 73: 28) suggestion of arms fit better in Egypt than Mesopotamia.

³³ Also Holly Pittman (1994: 191) sees in the Late Uruk glyptic repertoire images that begin for the first time "to narrate social relations and social behaviour."

used as a seed-corn for the next year, as in many agrarian societies (Jacobsen 1991: 116). The king's personal involvement in agricultural rituals is evidenced in later periods (Sallaberger 1993: 121, 187). The procession on the expanded image had no doubt a concrete counterpart in life performances of pompous celebrations that transmitted the new "myth" to the populace at large.

In conclusion, I doubt that the representation carved on the Uruk Vase intended to blur boundaries between human and divine, since gods were not yet represented in anthropomorphic shape. Instead I am inclined to see polysemy with regard to secondary layers of meaning. The ruler's encounter with a woman linked to Inana may have alluded to his role as provider of gods and humans, as mediator between gods and humans, and as procreator. The procession need neither have exclusively or at all referred to a wedding celebration as assumed by the "sacred marriage" adherents, nor exclusively to a harvest thanksgiving. Instead, it could have referred at the same time to the specific celebration that provided the occasion for the fashioning and dedication of the footed jar, and, in a more general way, to all festivals that included a procession and/or the provision of food. The carriers who carry vessels presumably full of bread or a jug may have brought along provisions for a banquet as in Early Dynastic imagery. All such celebrations served the same general purpose of bolstering and, at the same time, securing the powerful status and rank of the ruler and the ruling class in real life. Yet again, the procession can never have happened in this form, since the basic levels of water and crops cannot move. Thus, while the image alludes to various possible celebrations in real life, it arrests in stone the ideal and ideological image of the Late Uruk agrarian state promoted by its leader.

From the First State to Historical Kingship

Visual images from the time immediately following upon the Late Uruk period up to the later Early Dynastic period further support my thesis. The Late Uruk ruler figure lives on in a few stone objects that happen to be the earliest documents combining figurative imagery and written text: the unprovenienced Blau plaques, the Figure aux Plumes plaque from Girsu, and the so-called Ushumgal Kudurru, also without provenience, but possibly from Umma. They date to the transition between the Late Uruk and Early Dynastic period or to the beginning of the latter. Notwithstanding the difficulties in reading both their inscriptions and imagery, they have been included in the comprehensive study of the earliest land tenure systems under the assumption that they commemorate transfers of property with the text detailing the legal contract and the images representing ceremonies that sealed the transfer (Gelb et al. 1991: nos. 10–12, 18). This remains the most plausible interpretation.

Neither the texts nor the images suggest the identification of any of the represented anthropomorphic figures as a deity. The Ushumgal boulder is the earliest known "monument" that includes labels identifying the represented figures and these

turn out to be the individuals involved in the written contract. On one of the two Blau plaques the protagonist, who looks identical to the Late Uruk ruler, holds a small quadruped against his chest in the same way as humans, usually kings, who offer a kid to a deity do on Early Dynastic III and later images.³⁴ Similarly, the female protagonist on the Ushumgal boulder holds a jug, clearly indicating a human figure, while the male protagonist holds a peg-shaped object that may well represent the peg driven into the wall in the celebration of house sales in later periods (Cooper 2008a: 78). Moreover his hairstyle and beard are somewhat reminiscent of the Late Uruk royal figure, in contrast to the other, typically Early Dynastic figures, which might suggest that he was a leader harking back to Late Uruk times.

Only the interpretation of the Figure aux Plumes (Fig. 3) has been questioned: Claus Wilcke's (1995) proposal that the text may be the earliest known divine hymn, a praise to Ningirsu, rather than a contract, inspired Eva Braun-Holzinger (2007: 18, pl. 8) and Gianni Marchesi and Nicolò Marchetti (2011: 195) to interpret the male figure represented on it as a god. Braun-Holzinger, who acknowledges the tentative nature of her interpretation, attempts to support it with arguments pertaining to the image. The figure stands in front of two, perhaps three, large maces, one of which he is holding onto with his left hand. These maces are mentioned in the text, which emphasizes that they are made of lapis lazuli rather than wood or reed. Braun-Holzinger draws a parallel between them and the reed standards of Inana on the Uruk Vase and the seals that depict abridged versions of the latter. Since she sees Inana in these images, she suggests that the Figure aux Plumes represented Ningirsu.

While I concur with the functional comparison of mace and standard, my understanding of the figures differs. I see in the Figure aux Plumes a ruler who claims to be a representative of Ningirsu in parallel to my interpretation of the female in Late Uruk imagery: the maces flag the numinous presence of the warrior Ningirsu. Although different in style, the figure is reminiscent of the Late Uruk ruler figure with regard to attire and hairstyle: he wears a headband over long hair bulging in the neck, a beard, and a long, patterned kilt. Only what looks like two upright feathers on his head, probably attached to the headband on the side turned away from the viewer, differ. I cannot see any resemblance of this unique headgear with the two-pointed cap of the Late Uruk female. Instead I follow Thorkild Jacobsen (1991: 117), who saw two ears of barley, since the presumed feathers look just like the archaic cuneiform sign ŠE for barley. One can then draw a parallel to the ruler who holds a stalk or sheaf of barley on the above-discussed Late Uruk seals. Rita Dolce (1997), who also sees a vegetal element, suggests that this unique headgear represented a royal crown, to which I would add, one that underlined the ruler's role as provider. If this interpretation is correct, we would have in the Figure aux Plumes the first attestation of the well-known ideology that the Mesopotamian king is a representative of his state's divine

34 On the kid-carrier, see Suter 1991–93, and for Old Akkadian glyptic evidence also Felli 2006: 39–44.

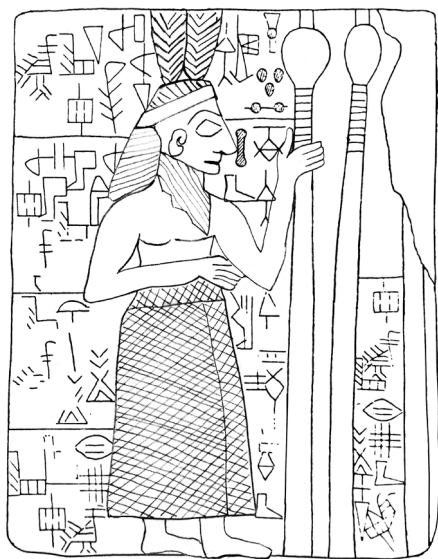


Figure 3: Obverse of the Figure aux Plumes plaque, H: 15.7 cm. Drawing by author based on Zervos 1935: pl. 53 and Gelb et al. 1991: pl. 33.

patron. This would also accord with the interpretation of the text as “a *kudurrû*-like monument to piously celebrate the purchase or possession of some tracts of land by an anonymous ruler, or the assignation of some fields to Ningirsu” (Civil 2013: 17 note 10).

The introduction of anthropomorphic deities and, with it, that of the visual marker of divinity in the form of a horned crown, can be observed in the earliest mythological images, which depict the moon god’s journey by boat through the sky (Collon 1997). They appear in what has been seen as the Early Dynastic II period, but may now have to be dated to the IIIa phase.³⁵ Originally the moon god’s headdress is simply a moon crescent, while in the ensuing Early Dynastic IIIb he wears a horned crown, like other anthropomorphic deities that begin to appear in this last phase of the Early Dynastic period. Licia Romano (2008) suggests that initially there existed different types of single horned crowns for deities of different spheres of influence, which were later transformed into the standard multiple horned crown as we know it in Old Akkadian imagery.³⁶

³⁵ So Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 84, 93. But see also the critical voices of Braun-Holzinger (2008: 157–58) and Rohn (2011: 3–7), who distinguish more generally between an earlier and a later Early Dynastic period (Braun-Holzinger 2007; Rohn 2011).

³⁶ Some scholars see the earliest anthropomorphic deities in the defenders of domesticated animals in combat scenes that appear around the same time as the moon god’s boat journey (for example, Lambert 1997: 3–4; Romano 2008: 48). While some of these figures are entirely anthropomorphic, others are mixed creatures, partly animal and partly human, recalling the prehistoric master of animals. Rather than deities, I see in these beings supernatural heroes. There were different degrees of

In sum, anthropomorphic deities started to be depicted in imagery in the Early Dynastic II or IIIa period, while the standard marker of divinity developed in the ensuing Early Dynastic IIIb period. It is hardly a coincidence that the first Sumerian god lists date to the same period as the earliest depiction of deities.³⁷ This time also coincides with the earliest images and inscriptions of historic kings whom we know by name. From the beginning, when historic kings and deities began to be depicted in imagery, there also existed conventions that allowed one to distinguish between them. At the same time, certain attributes that functioned as insignia could be shared between royals and deities, thus propagating their close relationship, the ideology according to which royals represent the gods on earth (Suter 2012b: 219–20). While such details may allude to the godlikeness of royals, they are always combined with a number of other realia that leave no doubt about whether a king/queen or god/goddess was represented.

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Postscript

Two studies dealing with the representation of deities in Mesopotamia have been published after this contribution was written. Both leave the question open whether the female on the Uruk Vase represented a goddess or a mortal: J. M. Asher-Greve and J. Goodnight Westenholz, *Goddess in Context* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2013: 163); E. A. Braun-Holzinger, *Frühe Götterdarstellungen in Mesopotamien* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2013: 33–34).

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divinity in Mesopotamia: deified objects, deified kings, or heroes were not on the same level as the gods of the pantheon (Selz 2008).

³⁷ For their Early Dynastic IIIa date, see Krebernik 1998: 259.

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Tallay Ornan

A Silent Message: Godlike Kings in Mesopotamian Art

Abstract: Standing at the head of the social hierarchy, the Mesopotamian king had a close relationship with the gods and was considered a mediator between the earthly and divine spheres. The interaction between kings and gods had a supreme role in ensuring social welfare and a vital function in the empowerment of the ruler. The worldly needs of the ruler led to continuous efforts to upgrade him by comparing him to the divine, as epitomized in the unique representation of Naram-Sin. As a one-time representation, however, this portrayal emphasizes how ambivalent and restrained the display of godlike kings in Mesopotamia was in general. The qualified approach of Mesopotamian iconography to royal deification is expressed in the consistent use of implicit and indirect measures to convey the godlike image of the king. A comparison between selected Mesopotamian pictorial and textual records sheds light on the difference between these two modes of expressions in conveying the divine status of the king, the visual mode being much more limited than the written one. It was perhaps the immense power of the visual mode, and its potentially explosive nature in relation to the fate of all mortals, including kings, that prevented direct and explicit representation of quasi-divine kings in the art of ancient Mesopotamia.

Keywords: royal deification, gods, godlike

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Introduction

The theme of the deified rulers of the ancient Near East has attracted Western scholars from the beginning of modern scholarship, a tendency strongly supported by ancient written records that, in certain areas and periods, classified the names of historic kings within the divine category. The modern fascination with the idea of the deification of living and dead kings probably also has to do with Orientalist perceptions that the deification of the mortal kings of the ancient Near East marked the required borders between the “other,” pre-monotheistic Near East and the contrasting monotheistic Western worldviews (Gradel 2002: 5; Bahrani 2003: 16). However, the growing body of evidence on the ancient Near East, and the ongoing efforts to contextualize it, have modified early modern perceptions of the deification of kings

in Mesopotamia. The multi-perspective reexaminations of this trope have resulted, among other insights, in the recognition of qualifications for deification of ancient Near Eastern kings (see, for example, Brisch 2008). These tendencies are at times supported by the study of royal deification in other areas and periods, such as the worship of the Roman Emperor, suggesting that “divinity” in antiquity is to be perceived as a relative category (Gradel 2002: 25–26) in which human and divine spheres may merge in certain circumstances.

The paramount indicator of divine royal status in Mesopotamia was the addition of the cuneiform sign *dingir*, denoting god in Sumerian, as a classifier preceding the name of a king. This process began in the reign of Naram-Sin, king of Akkad (2254–2218 BCE), continued during the Ur III period, and persisted sporadically until the reigns of Rim-Sin and Hammurabi in the first half of the 18th century (Winter 2008: 82; Cooper 2008: 261). The use of the *dingir* (“dingirization”) will be considered here a direct means of denoting a divine or quasi-divine figure, paralleled visually by the horns attached to the headgear of certain figures.

In contrast, other ways of identifying a king as a god or quasi-god will be deemed here indirect means. Indirect means of deification are expressed in a variety of literary genres such as royal inscriptions, myths and epics, or titular formulas. They can be traced in notions such as the divine pedigree of a king, the resemblance of the king to divine images, godlike stature and superhuman traits, quasi-divine royal accomplishments, or the intimate relationship of the king with the divine as manifested by sexual and parent-and-child metaphors. Although such indirect measures are inexplicit and somewhat ambiguous, their sustained use throughout Mesopotamian history demonstrates the desire of the Mesopotamian civilization to upgrade its kings by equating them to gods. This worldly political need was manipulated by the regime to buffer itself through the elevation of its highest persona to divine status (Winter 2008: 76). Concurrently, however, rigorous limitations on royal deification, found from the early phases of Mesopotamian history, shed light on the highly ambiguous character of this trope.

Two terms that are often used in the examination of royal images, “deification” and “sanctification,” deserve special attention. While the abstract concept of kingship was perceived as an institution transmitted to humanity by the divine (compare the Sumerian King List: ETCSL: t.2.1.1) and thus sanctified, the *dingir* applied to the names of kings hints that the latter could have been thought of as belonging to a divine or quasi-divine category and thus can be seen as deified. These figures, both living and dead kings, probably belonged to the lowest tier of the divine hierarchy and were mainly considered as protective *lama*-type entities mediating between the divine and human spheres.¹ Tangible images of kings that display divine insignia or are marked

¹ Braun-Holzinger 1991: 238; Jonker 1995: 190, 203, 210; Machinist 2006: 186; Winter 2008: 75; Pongratz-Leisten 2011: 141; Ornan 2012a: 15–16; compare Canepa 2009: 103–104.

with other distinctively divine features thus present the likelihood that they were intended to be perceived either as mediating minor deities or as images that could be “deified” by their onlookers.

That the divine and human categories were indeed relative and that the above-noted distinctions were interchangeable can be demonstrated by some Neo-Assyrian records. Whereas the writing of the names of Neo-Assyrian kings never used the *dingir* classifier, their generic royal image (*šalam šarri*), which stood in for the office of kingship, was sometimes prefixed with the *dingir* (Machinist 2006: 178–89), implying that, at least here, the office of kingship contained some divine essence while the individual king was not directly so. This distinction is made even clearer by indications that the generic royal image served as an object of veneration by the king (Machinist 2006: 180–81), demonstrating the intrinsic fluidity of Mesopotamian conceptions of the divine and royal spheres.

In antiquity, an individual person was perceived as a generic representative defined in relation to others rather than according to his/her individual characteristics (Pongratz-Leisten 2011: 138–39). Thus too the royal persona was perceived as a non-specific, generic image that was tailored to match the specific category(ies) of kings. Hence, material representations of kings aimed not to mimic their physiognomic features but to present them according to the image of a non-specific ideal king that exhibited carefully selected characteristics considered fit for a monarch (Winter 1997: 369–72, 374, 376; compare Root 1979: 305). Among these features are some that are also found in, or relate to, divine figures. Such depictions of royal images necessitate an examination of their status, definition, and roles.

This presentation aims to shed light, through the examination of the visual records, on the inherent tension, over the course of Mesopotamian history, between the political needs to equate kings with gods on the one hand, and the constant limitations on the former on the other hand. The pictorial strategies employed to present Mesopotamian kings as godlike figures will be explored here through a diachronic survey of selected depictions of living rulers. Juxtaposition of some of these images with contemporary texts will reveal a certain divergence between the written and the pictorial records concerning royal deification. Indeed, as has been argued (Winter 2008: 78–79), words and pictures are often differently voiced – a most valuable phenomenon, since such differences and contradictions can disclose intrinsic difficulties or unresolved cultural issues.

The representations discussed here will be examined in terms of several indirect markers that may hint or allude to divine-like royal figures and comprise six subsets: 1. Appropriation of divine attributes and insignia by kings; 2. Homology of body gestures between gods and kings; 3. The position of a royal figure within a given composition; 4. The direction – facing left or right – of a royal figure within a given composition; 5. Signs alluding to divine pedigree; and 6. Allusions to legendary accounts of archetypal kings.

The Third Millennium BCE

The Early Dynastic period

Our survey begins with the Stele of the Vultures erected by Eanatum (ca. 2500 BCE), ruler of Lagash (Moortgat 1969: 42–43, pls. 118–121; RIME 1: 126–40), precisely because the visual display does not exhibit markers denoting royal deification, whereas the inscription certainly does. First, the text mentions that Eanatum was granted a huge stature (ca. 2.75 m) by the god Ningirsu (Cooper 1986: 34 and n. 7), a height equal to that attributed to Ningirsu and demonstrating a textual homology between a god and a king. The pictorial representation in this respect is quite the opposite: although Eanatum is represented on the “human” (reverse) side of the monument as distinct from his fellow men (by being shown separated from them on the second and third registers from the top, and by his (reconstructed) bodily postures on the fourth and fifth registers), his stature is markedly smaller than that of Ningirsu, contrary to his description in the inscription.

As shown by Winter (1985), the stele manifests the first clear example of a pictorial narrative paralleled by a written account. However, the introduction of the text includes another narrative that is totally absent from the visual display. This less-discussed account, which describes the conception, birth, and suckling of the ruler, clearly implies links to the divine sphere (Winter 1985: 26). It also manifests typical narrative components: a sequence of actions taking place in a temporal progression involving a protagonist and accompanying characters, which here hint at the divine pedigree of Eanatum. Four actions are described here: an act of divine love – the semen of Eanatum implanted by Ningirsu in the womb of an unknown goddess; an act of deliverance – Inana accompanies the king; an act of caring – Inana puts Eanatum in the lap of Ninhursag; and an act of motherly nurturing – Ninhursag suckles him (RIME 1: E 1.9.3, col. iv 4–12, 18–29). None of these are depicted on the monument, although the third-millennium Mesopotamian visual repertoire had conventions for displaying most of them (see, for example, Aruz 2003: no. 311; Ornan 2010a). The absence from the visual display of the monument of themes relating to the king’s divine pedigree and stature, despite their description in the text, does not seem to be a coincidence. Rather, it establishes the rule for the next two millennia: whereas the text is more explicit with regard to the divine affinities of the king, the visual display tends to ignore or restrict allusions to the divinity of the Mesopotamian sovereign, and when it does refer to royal deification, it usually uses inexplicit means.

The Akkadian Period

The net held by Ningirsu to capture the enemies of Eanatum on the Stele of the Vultures reappears on the Stele of Sargon the Great (2334–2279 BCE), founder of the

Akkadian dynasty, on a stele discovered in Susa (Moortgat 1969: 47, pls. 126–27; Barrelet 1974: 42–44; Nigro 1998: 85–93). Despite the similar function of the net (used for the seizure of enemies) on the two monuments, its depiction on the Stele of Sargon marks a significant conceptual modification: instead of being used by the god, it is held by the king standing before the enthroned Ishtar. The transfer of the “ownership” of the net marks a royal appropriation of a divine attribute and epitomizes the promotion of the king by equating him to a major god, an indication that the Akkadian royal claim to a godlike status had already surfaced before Naram-Sin’s reign and continued Early Dynastic aspirations (Nigro 1998: 86–87). On this stele, Sargon can be perceived as an elevated figure whose role is to present the defeated rivals to the goddess in front of whom he stands. We may argue that the king, upgraded here to be seen as if a god, is fighting on behalf of the goddess, a theme that reappears in later phases of Mesopotamian art.

The peak of the Old Akkadian claims of divine status for the king occurred during the reign of Naram-Sin (2254–2218 BCE), during which he was declared the city-god of Akkad, as stated in the inscription on the Bassetki copper statue (RIME 2: 2.01.04.10, ex. 01) (see also Porter, this volume). The deification of Naram-Sin was epitomized by the addition of *dingir* to his name and was visually complemented by his wearing of the horned headgear on the Victory Stele, discovered in Susa but originally erected in Sippar (Moortgat 1969: 51–53, pls. 155–56; Braun-Holzinger 2007: 91–92). The visual classifier of deification, the horned crown, was probably the last component added to representations of Naram-Sin as the city-god of Akkad (Cooper 2008: 262). While the writing of the names of Mesopotamian kings with the *dingir*, first encountered on the Victory Stele, continued for several centuries, the king’s promotion through the horned headgear is only attested during Naram-Sin’s reign. Naram-Sin wearing the horned crown is also depicted on a large stone mold of unknown provenance, on which he is shown seated beside the enthroned Ishtar (Hansen 2002).² Nonetheless, even in these clear presentations of the king-god there are signs of ambivalence towards royal deification. On the Victory Stele the king’s large amuletic necklace bead implies his need for divine protection and his single tier of horns indicates his minor divine status (Winter 2008: 76–77). Similarly, on the stone mold, the binding of the prisoners by a rope that passes through Ishtar’s hands manifests Naram-Sin’s inferior divine status and may signal an ambivalence regarding royal divinization (Cooper 2008: 263, n.15).

Further hints of the divine status of Naram-Sin can be perhaps traced on a few Akkadian glyptic items that are part of the large group of Late Akkadian contest seals, whose recurring figures were a water buffalo, a lion, a hybrid human-headed bison, and a six-curved *lahmu*-like hero (Rohn 2011: 35–50, pls. 23–39). High-quality seals depicting such scenes were owned by members of the Akkadian dynasty and their

2 The authenticity of the object is disputed – see Braun-Holzinger 2007: 93–94, n. 59.

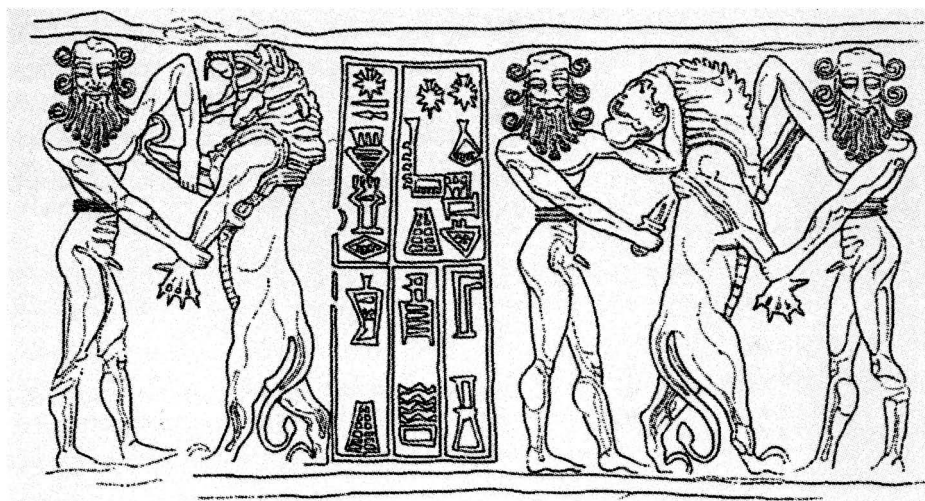


Figure 1: Akkadian seal impression on a clay tablet-envelope, depicting a lion subdued by two *lahmu* figures, unknown provenance. Aruz 2003: no. 134. Courtesy of Jonathan P. Rosen, New York.

entourage, and probably transmitted the notion of the regime's power (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002: 6–18, 21–22, figs. 2–4; Rohn 2011: 38–41, nos. 216–38). A particular layout of these seals may be related to the promotion of the Akkadian king by allusions to the legendary image of Gilgamesh. This layout is composed of three figures, two heroes flanking a subdued rival, and can be associated with (later) written mythic or epic accounts, such as the capture of the *anzu* bird and the killing of

Humbaba (Ornan 2010b: 240–43). Likewise, it can be suggested that depictions of two naked heroes overcoming a lion may have had similar associations with the tale about the legendary king of Uruk and his companion Enkidu. Links with these two protagonists of the Gilgamesh Epic are particularly compelling with regard to the subjugation of the lion, since it is a repeated refrain in the Epic (Ornan 2010b), and combat with a lion was a recurrent royal motive, a prerogative of the Mesopotamian king from the Uruk to the Neo-Assyrian periods (Moortgat 1969: 9, 14, pl. 14; Watanabe 2002: 83–86; Braun-Holzinger 2007: 11–12). Moreover, the resemblance of the two naked, girdled *lahmu* figures (Wiggermann 1994: 242) to the near-naked, valiant, and alluring body of Naram-Sin on the Victory Stele, combined with the sexual appeal of both Gilgamesh and Enkidu as described in the Epic (Winter 1996: 11, 14–19), supports a notion that the defeat of the lion on such Akkadian seals naming ^dNaram-Sin referred to both the legendary king of Uruk and the newly deified Akkadian ruler (Fig. 1). In such a case, this is an indirect measure hinting at the divine nexus and/or status of Naram-Sin by manipulating the celebrated image of a part-divine archetypal Mesopotamian king whose mother was a goddess.

Another glyptic group manifesting indirect means of alluding to the godlike image of the Akkadian king consists of cylinder seals depicting a man riding on an eagle, commonly identified with Etana, king of Kish, who according to the later written account flew on an eagle as part of his quest for an heir (Boehmer 1965: 122–23; Selz 1998: 156). The manipulation of the image of Etana, another archetypal king who in the Mesopotamian tradition received the gift of kingship from the gods (Foster 1995: 104), also emphasizes royal supernatural qualities (the flight itself). The large number of these Etana seals, and their restriction to the Akkadian period, particularly Naram-Sin's reign (Boehmer 1965: 122–23), may support the proposal of Selz (1988: 146, 153, 156–58) that these seals were part of a political propaganda that promoted the value of dynastic inheritance and elevated the king to a supernatural sphere.

The Periods of the Lagash II Dynasty, the Ur III Dynasty and its Aftermath

Like Eanatum, Gudea, the *ensi*-ruler of the city-state of Lagash,³ was said to have had a divine pedigree: he was the son of Nanše (Cylinder A, RIME 3.1: 70, cols. i 29, ii 1–3). Like Eanatum, he was granted a fit-to-rule body by the gods, receiving sublime bodily traits that were reflected in his statues (Winter 1989; 2008: 81–82). Despite this, most were carefully designed *not* to reveal explicitly his divinely constructed body or attributes, nor his divine pedigree. Signs for the upgrading of the image of Gudea,

³ A contemporary of Ur-Namma king of Ur (2112–2095 BCE).

though, are found in contemporary foundation peg figurines. On the one hand, inscriptions of Gudea are found on peg figurines depicting a horned lesser divinity. On the other hand, Gudea's inscriptions were inscribed on figurines representing the king as the builder of the temple, thus reviving Early Dynastic conventions of the Sumerian builder-king who carries a basket on his head (Ellis 1968: 61; Suter 2010: 320–21; see Cyl. A xx: 24–26 RIME 3.1, p. 82) (Fig. 2). In spite of the fact that Gudea appears without any divine markers on these figurines, his similar representation to lesser divinities shown on the same type of object, hints at a parallelism between these divinities and the king. Moreover, the “disguise” of Gudea as a foundation peg figurine turns him into an active figure who can bless the building activities (compare to a similar process with regard to Neo-Assyrian kings, below). The two types of Gudea's peg figurines reflect his double role: a human receiver of the divine blessing for the building activities on the one hand, and a disseminator of divine blessings for the (same) enterprises on the other hand. The double role of Gudea as manifested by the peg figurines reveals his mediating role, connecting the divine and the human spheres.⁴ This indirect means of representing the godlike status of the king continues in peg figurines of the Ur III and Larsa periods (Ellis 1968: 63–71; Braun-Holzinger 2007: 128–29; Suter 2010: 320), which equate the ruler to a lesser deity who possibly participated in building ceremonies. While Ur III glyptic items continue to convey allusions to the divinity of the king by the appropriation of divine insignia, they transmit these notions mainly by compositional arrangement. As shown by Winter (1986), such allusions are conveyed on these widely disseminated items by the very location of the royal image within the pictorial composition: the king always sits on the right side facing left, a location usually reserved for divine figures (Winter 1996: 12). While other meaningful components such as dresses or thrones may or may not be shown, two elements are consistent. Firstly, the king never wears a horned head-dress; and secondly, he always wears the royal *insignium* of the brimmed cap that clearly conveys that he is the king, while his position on the right side presents him as quasi-divine.

4 A similar duality can be suggested with regard to Statue N which presents Gudea holding the vase of abundance (hé.gal/*hegallu*), also shown on contemporary sealings mentioning Gudea in which the vase is held by Ningirsu (Barrelet 1974: 56, 87; Suter 2000: 54, 330, figs. 5, 9; Braun-Holzinger 2007: 116–17; RIME 3.1: 56). Like Ningirsu in the glyptic rendering, from whom prosperity emanates, Gudea in Statue N is the source of plenty. The concomitant display of the ruler as a recipient of divine plenty on the seal impressions, and as the source of such blessings on Statue N, may represent Gudea as a mediator between the divine and the earthly spheres and as a *lama*-type lesser entity (Suter 2010: 331–32). However, as Statue N was not found during the excavations of Telloh, but was claimed to be revealed at the site in 1924; acquired by the Musée du Louvre in 1967 (AO 22126, Johansen 1978: 21); and, in particular, since its authenticity has been challenged (Johansen 1978: 20–40; Alster 1978: 56–57), any implication on its meaning should be reserved.



Figure 2: Peg figurine of Gudea as a basket carrier from Telloh. Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre (AO258).

The indirect signs of deification in the Ur III period⁵ appear mainly on small finds, particularly in glyptic art, rather than on monumental art. It should be noted, how-

⁵ Textual dingirization was initiated after the 21st year of Šulgi, son and heir of Ur-Namma (Cooper 2008: 262).

ever, that very few monuments have survived from the Ur III period, in contrast to the rich repertoire from the period of the Lagash II dynasty. This brings us to the Stele of Ur-Namma (2112–2095 BCE), the only large monument surviving from the Ur III period, and to another indirect way to deify a king: allusions to a divine pedigree. The Ur-Namma Stele depicts the building of the temple of Nana on one side and its ceremonial inauguration on the other (Suter 2010: 333). The highest register of the better preserved side of the monument⁶ depicts, according to the reconstructions offered by Canby, the right-facing king standing in front of enthroned Nana and Ningal, his spouse (Canby 2001: 13, 17–18, 31, 33–34, pls. 7 (b, c), 10 (I), 22, 31, 33).⁷ The divine couple is depicted here in an uncommon visual metaphor used exclusively for the display of theogamy at the end of the third millennium – the goddess seated on the lap of her spouse. The motif is also found on door plaques from Telloh dated to the period of the Lagash II dynasty, and on a terracotta plaque of unknown provenance on which the enthroned god is crowned with a large crescent, clearly identifying him as the moon god Nana, patron god of Ur (Ornan 2010a). Representing the king in front of the loving Nana and Ningal on the highest register of the stele implies that the king is not only the chosen one, but is also to be perceived as the offspring of the major divine couple of Ur. Indeed, what was only narrated in words by Eanatum is visualized on the Ur-Namma Stele.

Whereas parent-child relationships between divine couples and kings are found in texts dealing with theogamy (Pongratz-Leisten 2008: 66–67; Nissinen 2001: 95–110), their pictorial display is rare. Text and picture seem to diverge in the realization of family metaphors indicating the divine origin of a king.⁸ The rare use of the lap-sitting motif in relation to the king emphasizes the restricted character of Mesopotamian art in relation to the royal claims for divinization in general and divine royal parenthood and lineage in particular. This restriction fits the assumption that the deification of Ur III kings is to be seen as referring to the office of kingship rather than to an individual, flesh-and-blood king. It accords with the doubts as to whether during this period, when textual royal deification reached its peak (Michalowski 2008), there was a specific material image of a dingirized king (Suter 2010: 331–32), and signals an ambiguity regarding Mesopotamian royal aspirations to divine status.

⁶ The two sides of the monument reveal a temporal sequence: the better preserved one can be regarded as the obverse since it depicts scenes relating to the building of the temple of the moon god Nana, while the other side shows its inauguration activities and hence is to be considered the reverse (Suter 2000: 270, 321–22, figs. 10–12).

⁷ For reservations on Canby's reconstruction see Suter 2005 and Winter 2003, particularly 404, who doubts whether the surviving feet of the figure in the lap are that of an adult; the depiction of the palm of this figure on the god's shoulder, however, suggests that it is an adult (Ornan 2010a).

⁸ Similarly, the often-discussed modern trope of the "sacred marriage" (reflected in texts as nuptial bonds of a deity and a human being, a god and a high-ranking female official or, more usually, the king and a goddess represented by a priestess, hinting at the intimate nexus of the king to the divine sphere) is not confirmed by material remains (Winter 2008: 79).

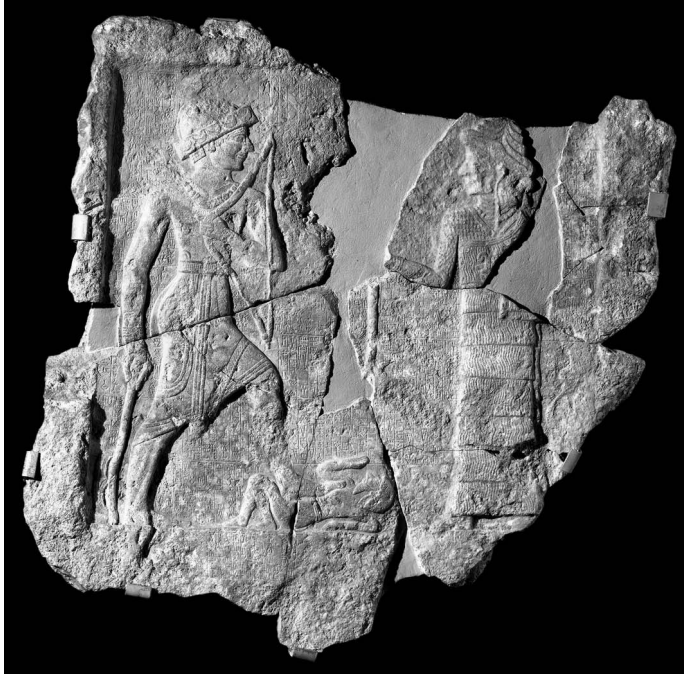


Figure 3: Rock relief of Iddin-Sin king of Simurru. Courtesy of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (71.73.248).

The use of indirect means to show divine affiliations through the appropriation of divine attributes can also be traced after the fall of the Ur III kingdom at the end of the third millennium, on the rock relief depicting ^dIddin-Sin, king of Simurru, located on the eastern slopes of the Zagros (Shaffer and Wasserman 2003) (Fig. 3). The king, shown on the left of the monument, tramples a defeated enemy while facing a goddess. In continuation of depictions on Ur III glyptics, and like portrayals of other rulers from this area (Postgate and Roaf 1997), he is wearing a brimmed hat identifying him as a king (Seidl, in Shaffer and Wasserman 2003: 41; Suter 2010: 343). However, in this case, the brimmed hat is exceptionally sculpted with a row of five crescents. The prime location of the crescents on the royal headgear of Iddin-Sin, coupled with the fact that since the Akkadian period the crescent had topped the horned headgear of the moon god (Collon 1992: 21–22), suggests that the addition of the crescents was linked to the very name Iddin-Sin (Seidl, in Shaffer and Wasserman 2003: 42) and, at the same time, may have aimed to align him with Sin.

Another possible means of bestowing a divine appearance on Iddin-Sin and other local rulers depicted on late third-millennium reliefs from the Zagros area is the trampling stance (Braun-Holzinger 2007: 149–52). The posture, which echoes that of Naram-Sin on the Victory Stele and continues into the Old Babylonian period (Seidl, in Shaffer and Wasserman 2003: 45), refers to the historical triumphal account of

Iddin-Sin and his son inscribed on the rock relief. Concurrently, however, the use of the trampling stance had alluded to major deities, particularly Shamash, since Akkadian times (Fischer 2002), and probably reinforced the quasi-divine associations of Iddin-Sin. Thus, the allusion to the godlike image of the king was achieved here by employing homology of body gesture.

The well-known statue of Puzur-Ishtar, the governor (*šakkanakku*) of Mari around 2032 BCE (Margueron 2004: 328), should be mentioned here, as the statue is still all too often brought up as an example of a deified king wearing a horned headgear. However, as proposed by Blocher (1999), the horns were sculpted more than a thousand years after it was made, possibly in the second half of the eighth or first half of the seventh century at Babylon. The statue of Puzur-Ishtar exemplifies an alternative dynamic of visual royal deification that occurred over time, whereby old royal images of kings changed their meaning and role and were perceived as lesser divinities. Another example of such a process is manifested by the proposed origin of the so-called “king with the mace,” identified as the protective divinity *udug/šedu*, modeled during the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian periods after the images of ancient Akkadian or Ur III kings (Wiggermann 1987: 23–29; Suter 2010: 343–45 respectively; see also Eppihimer, this volume). That the *udug/šedu* was indeed fashioned after images of old kings finds support in the splayed beard, typical of royal images, that is found on some of its representations (Suter 2010: 345).

The Second Millennium

The Old Babylonian Period

The splayed beard brings us back to Gilgamesh and to humble clay artifacts depicting pictorial features of the legendary archetypal Urukian king. Some terracotta figurines bear a large head recalling that of Humbaba surmounted by a figure wearing a short dress (Fig. 4). This figure has been identified by scholars as Gilgamesh trampling the head of Humbaba, an episode mentioned in the epic (Fig. 5) (Barrelet 1968: 410–11, nos. 677, 831; George 2003: 100, n. 39; see, however, Braun-Holzinger 2007: 164). The telling feature of such figurines for our concern is the frequent depiction of a splayed, fan-like beard of Gilgamesh, which forms part of the representations of kings from the time of Ibbi-Sin (Suter 2010: 345 and n. 78) until Zimrilim, as shown on the seal of his servant Mukanišum (Barrelet 1968: 78 and n. 4, 79; 1974: 35; and see below). The combination of typical royal characteristics of the late third to early second millennium with Gilgamesh-like figures supports the notion that Gilgamesh as a king was a meaningful and enduring icon for kings who aspired to a godlike image in southern Mesopotamia during the Old Babylonian period. That Gilgamesh was perceived as an archetypal Mesopotamian king also finds support in the very first object – a terracotta plaque – identified as the killing of



Figure 4: Terracotta figurine of Gilgamesh trampling the head of Humbaba, Tell Asmar. André-Salvini 2008: 356, no. 326. Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre (AO 12475).

Humbaba (Opitz 1929). Gilgamesh, shown on the left of the plaque, wears a chignon typical of Mesopotamian kings as early as the Early Dynastic period (Braun-Holzinger 2007: 83), and a splayed beard. The conjunction of contemporary features of the royal image with the figure of Gilgamesh speaks for the manipulation of his heroic image in popular art, indirectly evoking the godlike characteristics of the king during the Old Babylonian period.

The trampling posture of Gilgamesh leads to the Stele of Dadusha (ca. 1779 BCE), king of Eshnuna and a contemporary of Shamshi-Adad I king of Upper Mesopotamia



Figure 5: Drawing of a cylinder seal impression of Mukanišum, Mari. Ornan 2007: fig. 7.

(1803–1776 BCE), found near Tell Asmar, where the trampling king is seen on the left side of the upper register (Bahrani 2008: 133–47; for a different interpretation see Braun-Holzinger 2007: 152). The depiction including the trampling king (compare the Mardin Stele: Moortgat-Correns 1952–3) has concrete worldly associations, as it is part of the triumphal account inscribed on the monument (Ismail Khalil and Cavigneaux 2003). Yet, considering the contemporary common representations of major divinities shown in a similar posture trampling on beasts or fantastic hybrids – their primeval rivals (Wiggermann 1994: 226–27) – one cannot escape the impression that such depictions also indirectly signal a godlike king by demonstrating his heroic martial accomplishments, fitting to gods. However, the boundary between god and king with regard to the identity of the victorious figure is rather blurred during the Old Babylonian period. This is reflected by the manner in which the trampling is depicted on seals of two officials of Zimrilim from Mari (1775–1761 BCE), suggesting the lack of a decisive convention to identify the trampling figure (Ornan 2007): on the cylinder seal and impression of Ana-Sin-taklaku it is the god who strides over the enemies, while on the seal impression of Mukanišum (Fig. 5) it is the king who tramples enemies. On the impression of Mukanišum the king is also highlighted by his position between two goddesses, on the right an interceding-type goddess and on the left a warrior goddess, probably Ishtar. That Ishtar shares the victory with the king is expressed by her standing, like the king, on the pile of fallen enemies. The strong ties between king and goddess are also transmitted here by the fact that they hold a divine weapon of the same type, a sickle-sword (Barrelet 1974: 125–26, D 28, 32; see below). Yet another aspect of

close ties between the two in this impression is her touching his shoulder to convey her support.⁹

It must be remembered that the *dingir* was still in use (though gradually diminishing) during the time of the Isin-Larsa and the first dynasty of Babylon, until Rim-Sin (1822–1763 BCE) and Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE), alongside references to the *melammu* aura of both gods and kings (Winter 2008: 83). The epithets of the early second millennium kings reveal that the Mesopotamian king was considered at times as “the god of his people” (see, for example, RIME 4: E4.1.4.1), and as the loving spouse of Inana (RIME 4: E4.1.7.1, E4.1.7.1). In Hammurabi’s twenty-third year name it is said that the king’s name is like a divine one (RIME 4: E4.3.6.2), and in another instance Hammurabi, too, is considered as “the god of his people” (RIME 4: E4.3.6.10). In the prologue and epilogue of the Law Code stele, Hammurabi is described as rising like Šamaš and created by Sin, Dagan and Nintu (Roth 1997: 76–77, 80, 138, 139). Such notions, which border the divine, cannot be traced, however, in contemporary visual records.

The Middle Assyrian Period

Intriguing aspects of the divine status and characteristics of the king appear in the Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207). As part of a general dependence on earlier Babylonian and Sumerian literary traditions (Machinist 1976: 460–62), the hymn praising the king is full of descriptions shedding light on his divine royal characteristics: the king’s *melammu* (dazzling light) is first mentioned here with regard to an Assyrian monarch (Machinist 2006: 162), and his image is equated with the image (*šalmu*) of Enlil. Moreover, we are informed about his creation in an innovative manner: the king was engendered by being cast in a divine womb, and thus the king is described as both a divine child and a metal statue (Machinist 2006: 161–62). The casting of the king in the womb creates a unique metaphor that seems to be exclusive to kings (compare Psalms 2: 6–7; Tigay 2003), mirroring highly prized metal statues of kings, few of which have survived (Ornan 2012b).

However, despite the lush phrasing relating to the godlike features of the king, there are clear limitations to royal deification in the epic. There is no use of the *dingir*, and the epic avoids the straightforward attribution of fatherhood to Enlil by using *kima*: Enlil is *like* a father to the king, not his real father (Machinist 2006: 163–64). Using the subsets proposed here, we can find in the epic aspects of appropriation of divine features (the *melammu*), homology (the king’s *šalmu* – image – recalls that of Enlil), and

⁹ Compare a Neo-Babylonian cylinder seal showing Gilgamesh and Enkidu on which Ishtar touches the shoulder of Gilgamesh and arm of Enkidu (Collon 2001: 174, pls. 28, 42:340).

divine pedigree and quasi-familial relations with the divine. None of these, however, are found in contemporary visual representations.

Two well-known sculpted pedestals representing a royal figure were found at Assur. One, from room 6 of the temple of Ishtar, attributed by its dedicatory inscription to Tukulti-Ninurta I, shows the king as a worshipper without any divine markers (Bahrani 2003: 185–201; Herles 2006: 106–108). The form of the actual object and its depiction recall pedestals located within a shrine depicted on seal impressions on tablets from Assur dated to Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE; Feller 2010: 729); on one, the object of worship, Gula's dog, has survived (Herles 2006: 74–75, 221–22, figs. 266–67). A rendering more relevant to our discussion is depicted on a larger pedestal, probably a *nēmedu*,¹⁰ which was found outside the entrance to the Ishtar Temple, near the gate closest to the Sin-Šamaš Temple temple (Fig. 6). Here the royal image is highlighted by occupying the central location of the composition and emphasized by the two *lahmu*-like guardian figures flanking him. The composition recalls a temple facade (Herles 2006: 108–109, fig. 401; Winter 2008: 84) that permits a glance into its interior, in which the king replaces a divine image and, as befits a god, turns to the left. To convey that the king is like a god, two indirect means are employed here: his central location in the composition and, as in Ur III glyptics, his standing on the right facing left, as the gods usually do.



Figure 6: Cultic pedestal of Tukulti-Ninurta I, King of Assyria, Assur. Courtesy of the Museum of the Ancient Near East, Istanbul (7802).

¹⁰ The inscription on the similarly shaped pedestal, showing the king as a worshipper, designates the object as a *nēmedu* (Bahrani 2003: 192; and see below regarding the use of this term by Sennacherib).

The First Millennium

The Neo-Assyrian Period

Neo-Assyrian imagery, both textual and visual, is rich in rhetorical and pictorial means aiming to upgrade the royal image to the verge of divinity. Earlier insignia were continued, intensified and reinvented to fit the aspirations of the supreme ruler of the known world, sanctioned and responsible for maintaining order throughout his vast empire. This elevated human being was imbued with absolute authority as the earthly *iššakku* or *šaknu* representative of the god Aššur. Despite all this, the Assyrian king was not dingirized, nor was he shown with explicit divine markers; in this respect, Assyrian iconography followed earlier Mesopotamian notions of the limitations imposed on royal deification. That the *dingir* classifier does not appear with the names of the Assyrian kings, but only with their generic image of the office of kingship (*šalam šarri*), mirrors the separation between an individual, historical ruler and the office of kingship in relation to royal deification (Machinist 2006: 178–79).

Among the diverse means used to upgrade the Assyrian monarch, some can be considered as indirect measures conveying the godlike image of the king. The first has to do with a diachronic compositional shift: the gradual removal of protective, lesser divinities, which were in close proximity to the body of the king on ninth-century wall reliefs at Nimrud, to the palace's doorways and entrances during the late eighth and seventh century at Nineveh. By this shift the protective powers assigned to the secondary divinities were transferred to the king, turning him into an active figure that can operate his own supernatural power. The upgraded, godlike image of the king was now emphasized by being left as the sole elevated figure in certain compositions (Ornan 2005). The underlying message conveyed by this process accorded well with that of some earlier depictions: the king was implicitly perceived as a quasi-god who could have been compared with secondary deities.

Another manner of conveying the quasi-divine image of the king is the age-old Mesopotamian royal tradition of appropriating divine weapons, found, for example, on statues of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) (Fig. 7) and his son, Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE). They are portrayed as *išippu* purification priests, carrying in their right hand large sickle-swords identified with the *gamlu* of Aššur (Magen 1986: 69–73, pl. 14:1–3) and recalling the large sickle-sword hanging from the arm of Ninurta chasing *anzu*, the winged, horned lion hybrid, shown, for instance, on the wall reliefs at the entrance to his temple in Nimrud (Collon 2006: 101, figs. 161–62). The royal appropriation of divine weapons sought to equate the power of gods and kings, and implied their likeness, best epitomized by the term *tamšilu* (Machinist 2006: 176). The term, reused by Assurnasirpal for the first time since Naram-Sin, denotes equality and similarity and hints at shared physical and possibly other properties of gods and kings (Westenholz 2000: 110–11, 113 and n. 56; Pongratz-Leisten 2011: 142). Other expressions of the *tamšilu* are exemplified in the depictions of Assurnasirpal in battle,



Figure 7: Statue of Assurnasirpal II, king of Assyria, Nimrud. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum (BM 118871).

standing below the figure of Aššur on a relief from throne-room B in the Northwest palace in Nimrud, where king and god are represented in the identical bodily action of drawing a bow (Layard 1849: slab 3, pl. 13b). The parallel created through homology of god and king clearly signifies that the king here is godlike, since the bow was used by Ninurta against *anzu* and by Marduk against Tiamat (Westenholz 2000); it is visually recorded as a divine gift to the king on the Broken Obelisk of Aššur-bel-kala (Ornan 2007). That the king is the larger image on this relief is a repeated feature of Assyrian art, revealing that earthly needs often overcame godly ones in Assyria.

Impressive aspects of the *tamšilu* and other indirect means of upgrading the king to a godlike image are found on some of the monumental rock reliefs commissioned by Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) in Khinis-Bavian, northeast of Nineveh. These monuments were part of the huge constructions designed to bring water to Nineveh. A relief sculpted on one side of a huge block, previously part of the “gate” monument at the head of the Khinis System (Ornan 2007a: 167–68), shows Sennacherib standing between Aššur and Ninlil, obviously emphasized by this location (Fig. 8). Sennacherib is placed above a six-curved hero seizing a lion and holding a sickle-sword, a reference to the monumental slabs used by Sargon at Khorsabad. The location of

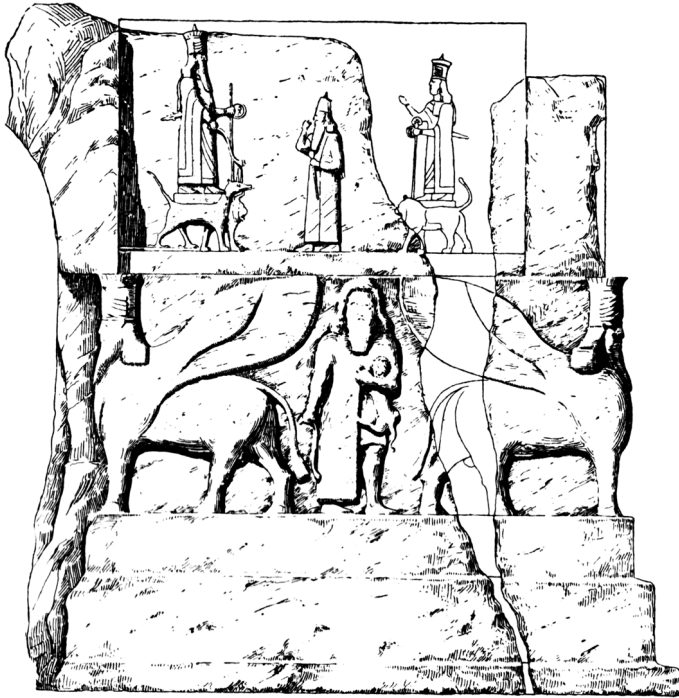


Figure 8: Drawing of the side-relief of the “gate” monument, showing the god Aššur and the double image of Sennacherib king of Assyria, Bavian-Khinis, northeast Assyria. Redrawn by Pnina Arad.

Sennacherib almost exactly above the heroic figure hints, however, at further associations between the two. The previously noted links between the lion-vanquisher(s) on the Akkadian sealings and Gilgamesh, combined with the archaistic features employed by the Sargonid kings,¹¹ may imply, as initially proposed by George Smith (1876: fig. following p. 174, 238–39; Steymans 2010: 1–4), that the hero is Gilgamesh. If so, the relief conflates the embodiment of the archetypal king with the image of the living king to bestow a godlike quality on Sennacherib’s image.

On another side of the huge block “gate” monument, the double image of Sennacherib flanks that of Aššur, a theme reflected in several seventh-century references (Winter 1997: 375–76; Cole and Machinist 1998: xiv). The unique depiction here, presenting side by side a front-facing god and two images of the king – the latter not in the typical stance of a worshipper – aspires to present the king as being close to and similar to the divine image (Ornan 2007: 168–69; compare Machinist 2006: 170–71,

¹¹ See for example the use of the third-early-second-millennium motif of the king trampling his rival by Tiglath-pileser III in Nimrud (Magen 1986: 55, pl. 22:1).

174). Moreover, the placing of the royal figure on either side of a divine image echoes the Old Assyrian convention found on the Assur Well Relief, where two secondary deities flank the god Aššur (Herles 2006: 102–104, fig. 399), and was possibly intended to be perceived as a lesser divinity, which by the early seventh century was an ancient Mesopotamian trope.

The radical representation of Sennacherib as a quasi-god fits very well the main theme of the Bavian Inscription, which reports the devastation of Babylon by flooding. Such an unprecedented destructive action, whose terrible outcome haunted Mesopotamian history for generations to come, is compared with Sennacherib's works to supply water to Nineveh (Van De Mieroop 2003). A most excessive means (the flood, the *abubu*), perceived as a terrible divine weapon, is appropriated by Sennacherib, who accordingly portrays himself as a god, to interfere in the order of nature on a grand scale. The image of Sennacherib depicted next to Aššur fighting Tiamat is also mentioned in the king's account of the bronze bands he had commissioned for the doors of the *akītu* house of Aššur in the city of Assur (Frahm 1997: 224). If these highly esteemed artifacts were actually made, they were probably, however, on a small scale in contrast to the renderings in Khinis, as indicated by similar actual bands such as the ones from Balawat that have survived (Schachner 2007). Hence, it may not be an accident of discovery that the extreme monumental portrayals of the king as a god in Khinis, alongside the unparalleled textual account, were found away from the capital. Considering the long history of avoiding direct references to the godlike image of Mesopotamian kings, the large-scale themes presented at Khinis could perhaps only have been realized at a distance from the heart of Assyria.

Another example of Sennacherib's innovative display of his aspirations to godlike status is found on wall reliefs in room 36 of the Southwest Palace in Nineveh, representing the siege of Lachish (Barnett *et al.* 1998: 101–105, pls. 322–52). The placing of the left-facing, enthroned king on the right wall of the room manifests the indirect compositional strategy discussed above, in which the ruler occupies the place of the god, accentuated here by the myriad participants on the other slabs of the room who turn toward the king. The significance of the location of Sennacherib on the right side of the entire Lachish cycle may have been enhanced here by the spatial associations created between the onlooker entering the room and the program of its reliefs, as it paralleled his experience,¹² to that of figures on the walls in approaching the king. We have here, then, another innovative tool in conveying the message of the quasi-divine Sennacherib. The message indirectly declaring “here is the godlike king” is further strengthened by the resemblance of the king's seat to that of Ninlil depicted on the rock reliefs of Maltai (Uehlinger 2003: 288), where the royal image is shown alongside the protective deities at the sides of her throne. The term *nēmedu* for the throne on which Sennacherib sits that appears in the short epigraph

¹² If the onlooker followed the sequence of the slabs displayed in room 36.

label accompanying the scene may further support divine allusions here since it refers to thrones of kings and gods as well as to cultic platforms or pedestals (CAD s. v. *nēmedu* 2, 3) such as, for example, the type of pedestal of Tukulti-Ninurta I discussed above.

The king's hunt of and combat with the lion, found in the ninth to seventh centuries in the decorative programs of Assyrian palaces and on sealings stamped by the state's seals (Nadali 2010), manifest the divine aspirations of the Assyrian king. The theme has been variously interpreted: as glorifying the king, as symbolizing his triumph over the wild uncivilized world and Assyria's enemies, or as enacting the myth of the rivals of Ninurta (Watanabe 2002: 70–71, 76–82 with previous bibliography; and in this volume). In any event, the lion was concurrently an attribute of Ishtar, on which she was often mounted. As noted above mount animals can be seen as primordial former foes of major deities who victoriously trample on them. Considering the close relationship of several Neo-Assyrian kings with Ishtar (cf. Livingstone 1989: 34; Parpola 1997: xxxvi–xli), the lion as a rival of the king may have also been seen as a rival of Ishtar, vanquished on her behalf by the king (Maul 2000: 37). In such a case the king could have been considered a member in her entourage, not unlike lesser divinities. This interpretation recalls the role of Eanatum in vanquishing Ningirsu's enemies and that of Sargon the Great on the above-mentioned Akkadian stele, on which the king presents the enemies to the goddess.

Continuing earlier Mesopotamian traditions, Neo-Assyrian writings are rich in texts explicitly demonstrating the intimate relationship of the king with the divine realm. Particularly relevant to the reliefs' representations of Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) defeating lions are texts narrating his quasi-familial relations with Ishtar, recalling the written account on Eanatum's Stele and the pictorial theme of the Stele of Ur-Namma, which transmit the notions of the divine parentage, nursing, suckling and raising of the king (Machinist 2006: 166–67). No records, however, that visually exhibit such themes have yet been uncovered. As in earlier periods, Assyrian art did not replicate its textual allusions to the intimate relations of kings with gods and goddesses in pictorial representations. Rather, as in earlier periods, it tended to ignore or perhaps even to silence them.

It should be stressed that the lion, besides its role as a divine rival, was a beast of the “real” world. Hence, the lion metaphor worked in both spheres – the king as the vanquisher of the gods' foe and concurrently an image of immense power in the real world – possibly reflecting his role as *iššakku* and *šaknu*, the earthly representative or administrator of the god Aššur (Machinist 2006: 155, 157, 182). This double meaning of the king's combat with the lion soon disappeared, however. A significant shift occurred in Achaemenid iconography, in which fantastic hybrids were introduced alongside the lion as the king's foes, hinting at the supernatural power of the Persian monarch (Root 1979: 304–305, 307–308). That no Mesopotamian ruler was shown fighting with or mounted on a fantastic creature may provide us with another clue for the reservations about the deification of kings in Mesopotamia.

Conclusions

Alongside the clear aspirations to royal deification that were motivated and governed by fundamental political needs, Mesopotamian art betrays limitations on depicting kings as gods throughout its history. The restraints on the visual manifestations of godlike kings in Mesopotamian art find support in the relatively short period (some 450 years) during which the divine classifier was applied in writing to royal names and its almost complete termination during the 18th century. When royal images were shown as quasi-gods, their perceived role was that of mediating figures that could have been compared with secondary *lama*-type divinities. This assumed role of the godlike king demonstrates the fluid relationships between the divine and human spheres in Mesopotamia and their gradated nature.

The qualified approach of Mesopotamian iconography to royal deification is expressed in the consistent use of implicit and indirect measures to convey the godlike image of the king. That the direct visual means for royal deification during the reign of Naram-Sin – the horned headgear – remains a lone example seems to be more the outcome of profound reservations about the idea of royal deification than an issue of unsuccessful religio-political manoeuvre (Winter 2008: 77). Only selected themes relating to royal deification are employed, such as royal appropriation of divine attributes, displaying the king in martial depictions that recall or allude to major deities, placing the king in compositional layouts that evoke divine representation, or employing images of archetypal kings in relation to the living king. This further demonstrates the qualified approval of royal deification in Mesopotamian art.

The above survey has shown that pictorial and textual records diverge in conveying the notion of the divine status of the king, the visual mode being much more limited and restrained. This is particularly demonstrated during the Ur III period, when, although textual dingirization of kings was the norm, the visual records adhered only to selected and indirect motifs relating to the royal claims for divine status. Indeed, the visual records in general manifest a smaller repertoire of motifs for the transmission of royal aspiration to godlike roles and status. Particularly noteworthy is the almost entire absence of themes referring to the divine pedigree and quasi-familial intimate relations of kings and gods from the visual renderings, while these repeatedly appear in texts from the mid-third millennium to the seventh century. The only exception is the possible reconstruction on the Ur-Namma Stele, in which the notion of divine pedigree, however, is indirectly implied. Among the inexplicit pictorial means transmitting the notion of the godlike king, we may perhaps include the metaphors alluding to Gilgamesh as an archetypal king through which divine lineage could at times be transmitted. As such Gilgamesh, indeed, exemplified the assumed occasional merging of the divine and human categories in ancient Mesopotamia (Bernbeck 2008: 158).

One may argue that the difference between text and image had a deeper rationale linked to the basic distinctions between these two manners of expression,

in their varied modes of transmission and in the ways they were grasped by their audience (Suter 2010; and see also, Sonik, this volume, and Eppihimer, this volume). However, since the ambiguity toward royal deification in Mesopotamia is also manifest in the written records and signals a difficulty in the inclusion of kings in the divine sphere, one is inclined to conclude that this ambiguity was much more profound. It mirrors an intrinsic difficulty with divine kingship that was probably governed by the very “paradox of divine kingship, the inevitable death of kings” (Michalowski 2008: 37). It was perhaps the immense power of the visual mode, and its potentially explosive nature in relation to the fate of all mortals, including kings, that prevented direct and explicit representation of quasi-divine kings in the art of ancient Mesopotamia.

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Anne Porter

When the Subject *is* the Object: Relational Ontologies, the Partible Person and Images of Naram-Sin¹

Abstract: Melanesia is a far cry from Mesopotamia, but Marilyn Strathern's delineation of the partible person in the Pacific offers more than a mere heuristic device for understanding the meaning of certain images of Naram-Sin. It offers a way to bring indigenous Mesopotamian ontologies into dialogue with Western approaches to art, revealing in the process the complexity of the relationship both between a "deified" human being and the objects that are supposed to represent him, and of the relationship between ruler and ruled.

Keywords: Akkadian, empire, Naram-Sin, objects, agency, partibility, personhood, relational ontologies

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Introduction

The title of this paper is intended to evoke two sets of relationships embodied in the one corpus of objects, that is, representations of the Akkadian ruler, Naram-Sin (c. 2254–2218 BCE). In the first set of those relationships, the subject is Naram-Sin and the object a literal reference to the materials in which he is hypostasized. In the second, the subjects are those of Naram-Sin's realm, the object, their subjugation. Or rather, since the purpose of this paper is to delineate aspects of political interaction within and beyond the Akkadian realm in addition to more traditional considerations of power, I should say, their integration. For relations of power are labyrinthine, composed of multiple, and multi-directional, means of enmeshment, some consciously enacted to a defined end – domination – some not.

In what follows I argue that the embodiment of Naram-Sin in this series of objects as they are disposed over space constitutes a living network of his (divine?) presence –

¹ I thank the members of the *Religion and Material Culture* reading group at USC for their thoughtful comments on an early draft of this paper, and especially Ann Marie Yasin for her illuminating notes. A version of this paper also benefitted from audience response when presented at the European Association of Archaeology, 2009. The trenchant criticisms of Marian Feldman and Erica Hill gave final shape to the paper and I am very grateful for their efforts on its behalf. No one but myself is responsible for any failure to rise to the mark.

a network that draws multiple beings into complex cosmological and political relationships. A network that works in very particular ways. Because these objects *are* Naram-Sin, and not just pictures of him, given as gifts to multiple constituencies, and because they are at the same time radical departures, in terms of art, from established convention, they disturb, enthrall, and render subject and object as one in the creating of a new political entity.

To use traditional language here such as “viewer and viewed” instead of subject and object would fail to capture the organic nature of the synthesis that I propose takes place.² Such language distances the participants in the relationship and renders their engagement passive. In this case, the relationship between these (and other) objects and the people with whom they interact is dynamically, and mutually, constitutive (Ingold 2006). It is an engagement of personhoods. A thing is a person when it is endowed with human attributes and human capabilities as individual people are so endowed (Strathern 1988: 181). Mesopotamian sources manifest concepts of relational ontologies that archaeologists of other times and places can only infer through ethnographic analogy. While data for the mid to late third millennium is limited, there is sufficient evidence for the period before and during Naram-Sin’s reign to warrant this understanding of components of material culture. The more extensive evidence available from the end of the third millennium suggests precise ways in which the concept works.

On the one side, images, even of ordinary humans, and certainly of gods, are not mere representatives of, nor only substitutes for, the individual for whom they are made or obtained, but are intrinsic components of them. They have the capacity, if not the intent, to act *as* that individual (Bahrani 2008) and therefore have agency. Since intentionality is not a necessary component of human agency (Porter 2010), it is therefore not a necessary component of object agency (Feldman 2010). And if statues of humans (and not just deities, or deified humans) act, then the corollary of this is that they are in some essential way persons. For it is not only the stone or wood itself that is animated, but the being embodied in that substance. Be it a clay figurine made for a spell (Nakamura 2005) or the stone statue of an ancestor, the materials of which the image is made are, at least initially, receptacles for the power or essence of the human or divine being. Diverse rituals³ accomplish a melding, or conversion, of conditions and materials, depending on the context in which the figure is to act/be.

In the case of gods, the concern is not to translate wood to flesh, but to translate the figure from earthly substance to otherworldliness at the same time as the figure is yet here on earth. The transformation of stone and wood into materials no longer of

2 And, moreover, if analyses such as that of Winter (2000) are correct, it would fail to take into account the fact that the statues themselves actively view the deity, if votive, and the worshipper, if god.

3 Although the most complete evidence for these rituals dates to the first millennium, similar practices are attested at the end of the third millennium, with fragmentary traces of them found in the mid-third millennium.

the human world is accomplished by rituals of separation, followed by rituals of presencing that bring the object, now a divine being, back into the human world in a new/original state (Berlejung 1997; Walker and Dick 1999). Terminology here is difficult, at least in part because Mesopotamian ontologies are difficult for us to grasp. “Animating” and “enlivening” imply that the wood or metal is simply galvanized in the manner of Frankenstein, whereas from the mid-third millennium on, statues of the gods are “born,” not made (Winter 1992⁴; Hurowitz 2003⁵). The verb *tud*, indicative of birth, is used uniquely for the making of anthropomorphic stone images – of gods, and of undeified kings such as Ur-nanshe (Winter 1992: 21–22) and Enmetana (Evans 2012: 112). Whether or not the concept of birthed statuary is consistently present from the first half of the third millennium to the end of it, Selz (1997: 176, n. 196–97) notes evidence from Early Dynastic Lagash for the naming of statues of the gods (and their stelae), which is, to him, in essence “the creating of an independent entity” (Selz 1997: 179). The provisioning of votive offerings for those very statues indicates they have the same ontological status as their less visible counterparts.⁶

Once the gods have been brought into this world as statues, they are awoken by mouth-opening/mouth-washing rituals,⁷ becoming fully functional when their eyes are similarly ritually unsealed (Winter 1992: 176). But it is not just the gods who are alive in their material forms. Multiple categories of figure from the third millennium and later, all of which are receptacles for, and conveyors of, humanness, and, some-

4 Winter (1992), in describing the similar transformation of statues of human rulers, is actually concerned with the images of a king who is apparently deified: Gudea. Other kings referenced, such as Šulgi and Šu-Sin, are also supposedly deified. In a further tautology, it is argued that these kings are divine because statues of them are erected in temples (Winter 1992: 195; Reichel 2008). As will be discussed below, an additional complication is the precise meaning of *dingir* in association with a ruler’s name. It is first in the Isin-Larsa period that there seems to be an incontrovertible reference to a king who is not at any point deified, but whose statue, as a votive object, is living, and that is to Sin-iqišam of Larsa (Winter 1992: 178). Statues of a king in a funerary chapel occupy a different ontological category altogether, and while there is no reason to assume that these representations of the dead would be born and awoken in the same way, as ancestors they are in some intrinsic way alive. Statues of ancestors would be subject to commemoration rather than worship, but could still have their own “votive” statues and offerings.

5 The evidence for agented statues in the Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods is certainly much more limited than for the end of the third millennium, when the inscriptions on Gudea’s statuary instructing the objects to speak, that is, pray, are clear (Frankfort 1939; Winter 1992, 2000, 2007; see also Selz 1997: 177); and it is of course a dubious undertaking to ascribe a situation to an earlier period derived from evidence from a later one. Such is also the case with the incantation texts that show both affect and action (as distinguished by Winter 2007: 44) in the pieces made for the performance of spells. However, see Selz 1997: 176, n. 196–97, and above.

6 Selz (1997: 179) also cites Westenholz (1987) for the Akkadian period practice of mentioning the creation of statues of the gods in royal year names – the very material under discussion here.

7 Argued by Civil (Reiner and Civil 1967: 211) to be in evidence in the mid-third millennium. These rituals are also afforded to non-humanoid objects (Selz 1997: 178).

times, human intent, are so operationalized by these and other means. That statues recovered from temples, especially those of Khafajah and Tell Asmar, are predominantly votive, working to intercede with the gods (who are themselves in statue form), on behalf, or in lieu, of ordinary human beings, has long been maintained (Frankfort 1939: 11;⁸ Jonker 1995 but see Evans 2012 for a necessary complication of this view). Both the gods as objects of intercession, and the votive statues, as intercessors, act, and act as persons – “other-than-human persons” (Hallowell 1960; Hill 2011). It has been remarked that the eyes of these pieces express their awe of the object on which they gaze (Winter 2000). But while “seeing” is undoubtedly important, it is not the only kind of interaction that takes place. A close study of find spots indicates that Early Dynastic statues were located in courtyards and at entrances (Evans 2012), spaces in which they may have been encountered by a wider range of participants than just the specialists of the inner sanctuary. The “viewer” of the statue – both human and human-as-statue – may also touch it (as temples are not museums),⁹ talk to, and speak of, it. These are discursive acts. If those statues are persons, then when humans interact with them in any capacity, the nature of the interaction is intellectual and, at the same time, social. The human interlocutor is not worked upon by the object without, or against, his/her will, but brings his or her own understandings of the world and how it works to the encounter. It is an active engagement in which the mind of the human conditions the relationship, the nature of the interaction, just as the nature of the interaction, including the very materiality of the object, conditions the human to understand the object as person. The relationship is therefore also social as any person-to-person interaction is social.¹⁰ When those objects constitute the distributed person, gifted to deities and subjects alike, then they act upon their recipients not only as the viewer is acted upon by that which they view, but as humans are acted upon by other humans in the extension of social relationships across space. And when those objects, as the royal person, are distributed far across space, then social relationships are inextricably linked to the body of the ruler as it is in turn the embodiment of territory of the kingdom.

My debt throughout this paper to the work of Mauss (1954), Strathern (1988) and Gell (1998) will be obvious. All have been discussed in so much detail that I will only iterate those elements of their work from which I draw – and diverge – here. While Mauss delineated the nature of prestation and the complexity of reciprocity, Strathern observed that certain objects were so intrinsic to the bodily identity of those who made/exchanged them, that they were physical parts of that person. The separation of those objects from the body in order to give them to others, their consequent re-absorption in the body by those who accept and wear them, act to constitute a biological unity of

8 Again, on the model of Gudea (Frankfort 1939: 11).

9 A point made by Evans (2012) in regard to assumptions as to the display of statues.

10 Social, and not religious, as Hill (2011) has argued.

giver, gift and giftee, creating thereby a community far beyond that which is traditionally meant by “collective.” Since the objects are the person, the person is partible – that is, physically dividable – and spatially distributed as the gifts circulate. The community as constituted by biologically synonymous members, is, at the same time, indivisible.

Gell’s notion of the distributed person is, to my mind, somewhat less difficult to encompass than that of Strathern; it is less alien to our own ontological frameworks, although his argumentation perhaps is not. Gell ultimately sees the object as an extension of the intent of the person, really having no intrinsic, or separate, agency of its own. Taking this discussion into the realms of “art,” and denying at the same time the traditional meanings of that term, Gell argues that objects work as the extension of the person (rather than *as* the person) over space because of the patterns embedded in the object that, on the one hand, are intended by the maker/owner to effect his/her will upon the viewer/recipient, and on the other, “captivate,” “fascinate,” perhaps intimidate through their “virtuosity.” It is an engagement of the mind, rather than only the body, that takes place in the intersection between owner/maker, object/pattern and viewer/recipient.

The imaged objects of Naram-Sin may be situated at the intersection of Gell’s notion of captivation and Strathern’s delineation of partibility, for on the one hand the execution of the pieces are, in any language, examples of virtuosity, whether in terms of Western aesthetics, indigenous concepts of beauty (Winter 1996), or as gifts. On the other, because the image is the person – and I will argue that stela work in the same way as statues here, at least in part because Mesopotamians themselves do not distinguish between them – the implications of partibility are also in play in the possible outcomes of the distribution of Naram-Sin’s images. If recognized by their recipients as not just a representation of the person, but the person himself, and if distributed as gifts, does not the acceptance of gifts of figures of the king indicate that Naram-Sin himself is among them? There is thus a latent relationship more internalized than that implied by the mere observation of an object.

Whether or not the reader is comfortable with the constructs of Strathern and/or Gell, it is the case that “people do not universally discriminate between the categories of living and non-living things” (Ingold 2006: 10). The question therefore is not whether this is possible, but whether Mesopotamians were one such people. The material outlined above is surely evidence of the ritual *creation*, and not just attribution, of autonomy to the image in Mesopotamia – the naming, placing, and enlivening of the object. Of course at this point the discussion is in general terms and there are doubtless some objects who¹¹ are only delegates of their original subject. But it is unlikely that those of Naram-Sin were some of them. The pattern of distribution, in conjunction with regularly repeated practice, is evidence of Naram-Sin’s intent. But that these pieces worked,

11 Since the objects under discussion in this paper are persons, the pronoun is appropriate.

acted, in the ways they did, was not dependent on that intent. It was, rather, a product of the intersection of artistic innovation – perhaps itself the product of an ontological dilemma – and long-established ontological convention.

In invoking the partible person, however, I do not intend to transport a ready-made explanation derived in one cultural context to another, but rather to illustrate the logical implications of certain conditions of these objects of Naram-Sin. Nor do I intend to claim that it is an identical process as that proposed (and contested) in the Melanesian context. For one thing, these are not wearable objects as are the *kula* that circulate in the creation of social connections and power. For another, the objects do not flow between numerous persons, creating a ring of linkages. In this instance, the objects are essentially stationary once delivered, and the ties are vertical as well as horizontal, connecting not so much different levels of a socio-political hierarchy, but rather, different ontological categories. The gods belong to one category, Naram-Sin another, and the objects of his subjectification (the populace of the empire) yet another.

This is not necessarily a position that all students of Naram-Sin's biography would maintain, either in terms of a general cosmological understanding or in terms of Naram-Sin's specific case. Although there is by no means unanimity, there is a general acceptance of the idea that Naram-Sin was indeed deified in his lifetime (such as Sallaberger 2007: 427 and see Brisch 2008 for a range of views). I am not of this opinion. Naram-Sin's apotheosis to godhead may be challenged on a number of fronts, not least of which is its incompatibility with indigenous conceptions of what was possible and what permissible in this regard. Moreover, each detail of the evidence – the precise meaning and usage of the divine determinative, *dingir*; the origins and chronology of its application to Naram-Sin; the historicity of the one direct allusion to Naram-Sin's divinization; and the significance of the horned cap he wears on the Victory Stele – is insecure. It should be noted too that my claim for partibility is not dependent on Naram-Sin's divinity, for, as outlined above, images of gods and humans are both, if not always equally, agented persons. While this is not the place to review the evidence, a task I will undertake elsewhere, the nature of Naram-Sin's being does shape the interpretation of the image, and specifically the relationship between patron, artist and recipient. At the same time, of course, the nature of Naram-Sin's being is constructed through interpretation of the image – both in the present and in the past.

The issue of Naram-Sin's divinity matters particularly in regard to the task of the artist. To date, analysis of Naram-Sin's image has proceeded on the assumption that the artist merely executes the will of the patron (Cooper 1990). This is problematic. The artist is as agented as any other being, and whatever choices he ultimately makes in carrying out his task, he begins with his understanding of cosmology. It has been proposed that the distance from king to god is short in Mesopotamia, so that the step supposed to have been taken by Naram-Sin would not be particularly transgressive (Bernbeck 2008; Winter 2008). I would argue to the contrary. For while there are great efforts made in a number of written sources, of different genres (see Selz 2008 for a

summary), to create a literal, rather than only figurative, kinship with the gods for certain individuals (Porter 2012), even those humans born of gods were *not* gods – including Gilgamesh (contra Bernbeck 2008: 158). Setting aside the issue of dingir and its meaning, it is nevertheless the case that none of these figures, historical or literary, are ever considered real gods in the stories about them. They are always ultimately human, even if more-than-human, living in the earthly realm no matter their ability to communicate with, or visit, the divine one. For as humans they die. While gods can also die, *their* death is not inevitable. That of humans is. Gilgamesh himself provides an excellent example of this situation. The one figure the frequent manipulation of which across time (in pursuit of various political agendas [Porter 2012]) would allow for a true and complete deification, he is at best only three-quarters divine. And yet Gilgamesh is not a god, or equal to a god, in any of the stories about him. He might be more-than-human, but for him, as clearly expressed in both Sumerian and Akkadian story sets, death is, indeed, inevitable.

For kings, that divine *kinship* seems to be an essential part of rule, but a part that creates what are to us problematic ontological outcomes. It does not allow for deification (and surely someone before Naram-Sin would have capitalized on this potential if it did), even though to us it seems as though it should. We regard indigenous categories of existence as blurred or fuzzy (Selz 2008: 14; Bahrani 2008: 99), and consequently as evidence of fungibility, because human-animal hybrids¹² and divine-human hybrids seem to abound in the Mesopotamian sources, while human and thing are, in certain circumstances, entirely interchangeable. Therefore for some scholars, there is little difference between the divinely appointed king and the divine king (Selz 2008; Winter 2008). But such hybrid beings are simply based on a different conception of existence than ours, whether or not those conceptions originated in theological, administrative or philosophical cogitation (Veldhuis 2006). The very significance of the classificatory endeavor, especially as related to the origin and purpose of writing (Civil 1995; Glassner 2003; Veldhuis 2006; Selz 2008; Porter 2012), was in order to establish examples, if not outright rules, of not just *categories* of being, but their natures and substances too. Despite the apparent fuzziness, such categories were carefully regulated. We just do not understand the rules.

But perhaps Naram-Sin's objects themselves give us some understanding of those rules, for I would argue they firmly place Naram-Sin in the liminal category traditionally occupied by kings (Winter 2008). In general cosmological terms then, this would suggest that even if conceptually possible, deification was certainly not easily assimilable as far as those beyond the royal person were concerned, which in turn might suggest that there were indeed some ontological boundaries in place. In the case of Naram-Sin himself, this liminality is key to understanding not only the signification of his images but the signification of their distribution.

12 I use this term here in its original, rather than post-colonial, sense.



Figure 1: The find-spots of three objects of Naram-Sin: Diyarbakir (photo, Istanbul Archaeology Museum); Bassetki (photo, US State Dept); Victory Stele (photo, Jastrow 2005).

For Naram-Sin's regime had a particular habit:¹³ it marked great military victories by the dedication of a votive statue or stele to a particular god, often choosing materials from the conquered regions as the basis for the monument celebrating that particular victory (Winter 1999) and recording the event in an inscription. Then it seems that those statues/stelae were sent to places *other* than the ones just defeated. The monumental stele commemorating the victory over the Lullabi, who are thought to have been located to the east, was originally erected in Sippar (subsequently to be taken to Susa as booty), while the statue that celebrates the repression of the rebellion by the coalition of southern kings was found far to the north, at Bassetki. From Diyarbakir (Pir Hussein) comes a third piece, a stele, the battle for which it was erected unknown as the inscription is broken (Fig. 1).¹⁴ Reference to Naram-Sin's desire to pile up mounds of the dead, however, make it clear that this piece is indeed related to a conflict. There are also several objects for which only copies of the inscription remain, recorded as training exercises by scribes.

RIME 2	defeated enemy	to god	object type	location
E2.1.4.5	unknown	Sin	statue	unknown
E2.1.4.11	9 victories	Enlil	unknown	unknown
E2.1.4.12	9 victories	Enlil	unknown	unknown
E2.1.4.13	9 + Magan	unknown	statue	Susa?
E2.1.4.23	HARšamat	Enlil	"image"	unknown
E2.1.4.24	unknown	unknown/none?	stele	Diyarbakir ¹⁵
E2.1.4.25	Talhad	Ningublaga	statue	unknown
E2.1.4.26	Amarnum/Ebla	Sin	statue	temple/ Larsa?
E2.1.4.31	Lullubu	unknown	stele	Sippar ¹⁶

13 A practice not begun by Naram-Sin however – his predecessor Rimush also distributed inscribed votive objects to key cities within and beyond the core of his realm (Eidem et al. 2001: 105; Sallaberger 2007: 424). Moreover, although none of the extant pieces constitute statuary, the relationship between deity, military campaigns and gifts to both local and regional authorities (Sallaberger 2007: 424) parallels precisely the pattern outlined in this paper. Dedication to a deity and palatial provenance indicating political gifts are not necessarily mutually exclusive in this pattern.

14 There are two other objects that some might include in this discussion. The first is the bowl from a private collection published by Hansen (2002, 2003). Braun-Holzinger (2007: 93–94) and Michalowski (2008: 34) dismiss this object as a forgery. The second is the Akkadian period copper head found at Nineveh and often attributed to Naram-Sin. I have not included it, however, as it might equally well portray any other member of the Sargonic dynasty (Hansen 2003: 194) in the absence of any specific evidence connecting it to Naram-Sin as is found on the three items considered here. See below for further discussion.

15 This is the stele from Pir Hussein referred to in this paper.

16 That is, the Victory Stele.

Two of these pieces are particularly renowned in the history of art for their newly naturalistic treatment of the body and the beauty they portray not only in our contemporary Western terms, but in the aesthetic language of the Mesopotamians themselves (Winter 1996; Hansen 2002). These are the Victory Stele and the figure in the round found at Bassetki, and they are connected in a number of ways. Each bears an inscription registering Naram-Sin's name, and both have come to be seen as unambiguous evidence for Naram-Sin's deification. This is especially the case with the Bassetki piece (Hansen 2003: 195), which carries an inscription that reads (after RIME 2: 113–14):

Naram-Sin, the mighty, king of Agade, when the four quarters together revolted against him, through the love which the goddess Ishtar showed him, he was victorious in nine battles in one year, and the kings whom they had raised he captured. In view of the fact that he protected the foundations of his city from danger, his city requested from Ishtar in Eanna, Enlil in Nippur, Dagan in Tuttul, Ninhursag in Kesh, Ea in Eridu, Sin in Ur, Shamas in Sippar, Nergal in Kutha, that Naram-Sin be god of their city, and they built within Agade a temple to him.

The identification of the *figure* on the Bassetki piece is not so clear-cut however. It is recognized that it is of the naked bearded hero on the basis of the tasseled belt around the figure's waist (Hansen 2003), but I would go further and propose that it is specifically the portrayal of Naram-Sin as the naked bearded hero, and that it is only in this interpretation that the connection of text and figure, side by side, make sense. The two are not otherwise immediately congruent.

However, if the naked hero is in fact Naram-Sin, then they become so. First, the figure on the Bassetki statue shares the same, naturalistic, modeled musculature of Naram-Sin on the Victory stele. Second, if the text requests (but is not necessarily granted)¹⁷ Naram-Sin's divinity, the image claims the characteristic liminality of human kingship. The naked bearded hero is an image well known in a number of contexts, but not well understood. Claimed by some as a *lahmu*, or "hairy," (Wiggerman 1983, 1992; RIME 2: 113; disputed by Ellis 1995), called by others "master of animals" (Costello 2010), there is another situation in which this figure is frequently depicted, and that is as guardian of cosmic boundaries.¹⁸ The positioning of the figure here provides a clue that this is the role intended for the Bassetki piece: the legs are wrapped around a socket that probably held a standard or gatepost, also referred to as a "cult symbol" (Szarynska 1989). The gatepost, pictured as a bundle of reeds with a looped end or as a wooden pole with ring, has been associated with the later rod, rope and ring that came to be traditional symbols of kingship (Spyckett 2000; Maekawa

¹⁷ It is to be noted that this text does not use the divine determinative in association with Naram-Sin's name (Westenholz 2000: 553).

¹⁸ The apotropaic nature of the "hairy" in later times is in keeping with the fundamental nature of the naked hero as guardian.

2010). It was the earliest form of the representation of Inana in archaic Uruk tablets (Szarzynska 1989).

The gatepost is so-called because it demarcated doorways – that is, liminal places – to sacred space. It denotes this space on a number of iconic images – the Warka vase for example, where the procession ends at the house of Inana, which itself appears to be the threshold to the realm of the gods.¹⁹ Texts also indicate a relationship between this symbol and Inana's temple (Steinkeller 1998: 91), but it is not confined to her sacred spaces. On an Akkadian seal (Aruz 2003: 214–15, no. 141), Ea is encased in a frame formed by opposing naked heroes holding gateposts. But it is the cylinder seal that shows a series of kneeling bearded heroes holding the same gatepost (Aruz 2003: 217, no. 145) that renders the connections explicit. These figures are surmounted with a selection of emblems representing divinities.²⁰ This scene suggests a representation of cosmology, but here the naked hero is the guardian of the boundaries between the two planes of existence. The heavens are represented by the astral signs, while the gateposts mark the threshold between worlds. Liminality, where one is neither one place nor the other, neither of one state of being or another, but poised on a threshold between places, or between states, is, I would argue, a critical concept in the Mesopotamian world, evident in sources as varied as the visual demarcation of human from divine space on seals, and the ritual control of movement between this world and the netherworld that is *kispu*. The boundary or space where transitions takes place, especially between worlds – this world, the world of the gods, the netherworld – is fraught with danger and risk, and as well fraught with philosophical complexity.

So why would Naram-Sin be represented as the bearded hero? On one level, if it is as protector of his city that the deification of Naram-Sin is requested from the gods, it is as protector that he is portrayed in the Bassetki statue, and the artist has simply portrayed the king in the same terms the king is always understood: as defender of the people and as guardian of human/divine relations. Text and figure are, in this way, commensurate.

Have we over-read the text? Is the apparent request for divinity actually simply an acknowledgement of the almost superhuman nature of the naked hero? Perhaps it is a covert snub to Naram-Sin's overweening ambition that he is portrayed in the guise of

19 Bahrani (2002: 18) reads this as the temple storehouse, for this is where the offerings go, the duplication of the gateposts a continuation of the repetition that characterizes the vase. I suggest, however, that the entire scene is a cosmological representation, showing the human world and all that is in it, set against a glimpse of the divine world and all that is in that. The female figure – Inana herself or her priestess – guards the threshold to the divine world in reverent pose. Her hand appears to be in front of her face in the traditional posture of prayer. This might suggest the figure is not Inana, for why would she pray to herself? But if it is indeed the divine realm that stands behind her, it is quite appropriate for the goddess to display her own reverence for the world of the gods and all in it.

20 One of these emblems is also featured on the Victory Stele.

a figure ultimately located on this side of the divine threshold? Or has the artist struggled to represent something ontologically impossible? Naram-Sin's person, as a deified human, would occupy a uniquely liminal place in cosmological terms, one that it must have been extremely difficult to find ways of expressing. He is now a god but yet there is nothing about him that is different than before. His body has not changed, it is still fleshed, still motile, and still present. But the gods as statues are *not* motile, nor fleshed. There is something *other* about them that is captured in any pictorial rendition. Their bodies are always somehow stiff and certainly stylized, because the gods are seen only in their statuary selves. Even as human representations become more generally naturalistic, divine ones remain unchanged.²¹ The gods are corporeal but ever unseen except in their wooden/silver/stone personae, while Naram-Sin is knowable. He is knowable through his human visibility and he can never therefore be truly god-like no matter his adoption of the insignia of divinity, because his body is unchanged. There are deep philosophical conundrums here that the artist has to get around, and moreover communicate to the viewer. This it seems the artist understood, for in rendering the body of Naram-Sin, he rendered indeed, in its muscular beauty, its humanness and not its otherworldliness. This is particularly evident in the Victory Stele, where the deity, often thought to be Ishtar, is represented only symbolically, emphasizing the conceptual distance between Naram-Sin and herself. At the same time, Naram-Sin is unambiguously located far beneath the astral plane. He might be bigger and better than other humans – even more-than-human – but he is still in that space between. More than this: although the scene is not divided into the traditional registers, there is nevertheless a spatial demarcation, a set of boundaries, on the Victory Stele that keeps the various elements of the image firmly in their place. They are created horizontally by the terrain that Naram-Sin and his army ascend, paralleled above by the astral symbols; vertically by the mountain and, beneath it, the trees. The end result is that Naram-Sin is effectively boxed in. He remains within the human realm.

There is another aspect of liminality, however, that imbues these pieces: the liminality of place (Fig. 1). The Bassetki statue, the Diyarbakir Stele and even the Victory Stele, originally erected in Sippar, each demarcate spatial relationships that are at the same time social, political and cosmological relationships. And so it is that particular kinds of images are chosen for the distribution of Naram-Sin's person across space.

²¹ See for example, Aruz 2003: 213, no. 139, 216, no. 143. Ishtar in particular is often highly stylized. In contrast, human, animal, and superhuman figures such as the naked hero, are comparatively naturalistic and fluid. See for example, Aruz 2003: 209, no. 135. The contrast is also evident in seals such as Aruz 2003: 230–31, no. 157b, where despite the fact that deity, hero, lion and human-headed bison, are all represented with the same kind of defined arm and leg muscles, the god's side-ways pose renders a fixity to him not shared by the intertwined figures on the rest of the seal, and especially not with the human-headed bison and hero. Their "face front" depiction gives an animation the god lacks.

Sippar might be understood as marking the southern boundary to the core region of Akkad's political identity, or conversely, the entrance to the sphere of the independent Mesopotamian city-states incorporated by Sargon into his kingdom of the north. That the southern region was conceived of by Akkadian kings as alien in some essential way, and certainly resistant, is evident in Naram-Sin's own record of the "Great Revolt" (RIME 2; Tinney 1995; Sommerfeld 2000). The statue of Naram-Sin as the bearded hero was found in the northern reaches of Akkadian influence, if not control. This is a liminal place in its own right, not only because it lay at the edge of the Mesopotamian world, but also because it is between river plain and mountain. One wonders therefore if the figure of the bearded hero was quite deliberately chosen for this place, especially given that the mountain is a synonym for a second otherworldly space, the netherworld, and Nergal, the god of the underworld is frequently invoked by this king, who also likes to pile up burial mounds, as referenced in the Diyarbakir stele from the same general region. Made of basalt, the Diyarbakir stele shows Naram-Sin with many of the features known from his other depictions – the modeled and well-muscled shoulders and arms of the Victory stele, and, too, the hairstyles of the sculptures in the round thought to be images of him.

Naram-Sin does claim to have reached the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates in one year name (RIME 2) and so it is not unreasonable to think that the piece may have been placed originally somewhere in the vicinity of its find spot near the top of the Tigris, rather than brought there after some northern conquest of another place – but not because Naram-Sin did indeed defeat this area. Like Bassetki, this area is at the very outer reaches of Mesopotamian influence, and like Bassetki it is located near the interface between mountain and plain and may have marked the conceptual boundaries of this ruler's ambitions, the four quarters he asserts as his in his titulary. But scholars are at odds over the legitimacy of this claim, some taking it at face value, more or less, others denying any historical validity to the notion of an Akkadian empire (see the collected entries in Liverani 1993). Goodnick Westenholz (2004: 10) and Sallaberger (2007: 425–28), for example, both accept that Northern Syria at least was firmly in Naram-Sin's control, no doubt because of bricks stamped with Naram-Sin's name from a building at Tell Brak (see Porter 2010 for further discussion). Indeed, for many, the presence of these objects in these remote places is sufficient proof of Akkadian control. And yet (and contra Hansen 2002: 104), royal inscriptions registering campaigns in an area do not mean those areas were necessarily incorporated into the kingdom – they do not even mean there were campaigns!

This pattern of objects found at what must have been, in the most generous of reconstructions, the edges of empire, is further manifest in the recovery from Nineveh, a scant 100 km southeast of Bassetki, of one of the other renowned sculptures of this period, the copper-alloy head thought by some to be of Naram-Sin himself, and certainly dating to this period of revolution in Akkadian art (Hansen in Aruz 2003: 193, fig. 57). Goodnick Westenholz (2004), amongst others, challenges both the evi-

dence for its presence in Nineveh during the Akkadian period, and its value as evidence for Akkadian control of Nineveh at that time, arguing it was brought there much later (but cf. Sallaberger 2007: 428, n. 61). The discovery of this and two inscribed stone objects that refer to Naram-Sin's building activities at Nippur in religious contexts of the first millennium at Nineveh does not, however, preclude their earlier presence at the site within the temple precincts of the third millennium. They may simply have been relocated in the new constructions of later periods. Nor does this evidence require that temple to have been an Akkadian construct. The fact that it is in the area of the Nabu and Ishtar temples, the find spots of this material, that an Akkadian period (rather than Akkadian culture) occupation has been found (McMahon 1998) further supports this proposal.²² If indeed a Hurrian settlement in the Akkadian period (Goodnick Westenholz 2004: 10), then Nineveh is of a piece with Bassetki and Diyarbakir – outside the zone of effective military engagement and certainly direct administrative control in distance parity terms (Stein 1999). I propose that it is well within keeping of the pattern described here for Naram-Sin to have sent such a piece to Nineveh precisely *because* there was no imperial presence there. It is the gift itself that creates one.

Historical narratives often assume that Naram-Sin controlled these places simply *because* his stelae and statuary were present there. Why else would an independent polity allow images of a foreign ruler to stand? One may well wonder why polities beyond Naram-Sin's effective reach would accept and display gifts demonstrating his overwhelming power, whether through depictions of his military might and/or divine self. It is possible, certainly, that the sites at which these pieces were located lay at the edges of one polity or another and so were open to contestation. It is also possible that the find spots were embedded in the heart of one northern political entity or another. In both cases, it is as guardian that these gifts would have been received and understood. Images such as the bullman and naked hero were widespread across the north, manifest at sites such as Tell Brak (Oates et al. 2001) and Tell Banat (Porter 1999) to name but two. While there is no guarantee that interpretations of these images were the same from one place to another, in the practice of gift giving it is the nature of the superior power, whatever the effective limitations of that power, to offer itself as protector. And it is a matter of prudence for the inferior power to accept, at least nominally, that offer through reception of the gift.

Indeed, political relationships in Mesopotamia and beyond were established through very calculated practices of reciprocal gift-giving that cannot appropriately be characterized as only tributary (Pollock 1999). While tributary relationships existed, even clearly asymmetrical engagements between polities, and between polities and their constituents, could be characterized by bi-directional flow of goods as

²² The ceramic sequence as established at Tell Brak (Oates et al. 2001) should not be taken as evidence for a later dating of the Nineveh sequence for it is not without its own problems (Porter 2007: 89–92).

gifts,²³ in particular textiles and metals, but even statues, or the craftsmen (Archi 1999) who made them. The notion of gift-giving has been argued to simply mask commodity exchange (Zaccagnini 2000, although gift and commodity systems often exist side by side), with the precise attention to details like weight and quality indicative to some of an essentially commercial understanding of such exchange (Feldman 2006: 108). However such details are also essential to measuring to a nicety the degree of reciprocation required in prestation according to the multiple concerns at stake: the nature of the relationship, the image the givers wish to maintain, even the message the givers wish to imply. They are also essential to keeping careful track of the state of the treasury in some contexts. But whatever the case with the circulation of materials between polities, relationships between this world and the other worlds, including the world of the dead, are maintained by gifts. And representations of Naram-Sin are, according to his own inscriptions, first and foremost gifts to the gods.

Strathern (1988: 180) states that “in a gift economy, social relations are made the overt objects of people’s activities,” in order, as Julian Thomas (2006: 124) puts it, “to reconfigure social relations in a favourable manner,” while for Gell (1998), art is “produced in order to influence the thoughts and actions of others” (Hoskins 2005: 75). Strathern (1988: 181) goes on to say that:

for a mind or a body to be in the position of eliciting an effect from another, to evince power or capability, it must manifest in a particular concrete way, which then becomes the elicitory trigger. This can only be done through the appropriate aesthetic.

It is this aesthetic that is the crux of the matter. For it is in the conjunction of meanings that are at one and the same time new, yet old, that virtuosity is created. That “the deification of Naram-Sin necessitated an entirely new artistic statement” (Hansen 2002: 105) is often iterated (Bernbeck 2008: 163). And whether it was actual deification, resistance to it, or the unintended consequence of an earlier political act that caused it, or something else altogether, a new artistic tradition did emerge, and abruptly. There was no gradual evolution, but the sudden imposition of a new style. As the old rules of stele composition are abandoned, Naram-Sin is shown in new relationships to space and subject. He is, in the words of Strathern (1988: 13), the “plural and composite site of the relationships that produced” him – at least, that is how the elements of his self-view, expressed in the depiction of the deities, his military support, his enemies, on the Victory Stele may be read. And indeed, Naram-Sin is shown in a new physicality as so often noted, yet it is one not necessarily created to express a new ontological category, but rather, perhaps, to deny it.

23 This has not received sufficient explicit treatment for the third millennium as yet although I would hope Marian Feldman’s work (2006) on the period of international diplomacy in the late second millennium would inspire it.

At the same time, the images of Naram-Sin intersect with an older tradition: the temple statues and celebratory stelae of the Early Dynastic period. And if Naram-Sin in these images is understood *not* as deified, or if deification is contested by the artisan, then the notion of liminality – liminality both of place and of the king's person – reveals another dimension to his materiality since there is a direct continuity of function in evidence between the earlier material and the new. Just as the Early Dynastic statues, images of Naram-Sin are simultaneously *kudurru* and person; mediators between mortal and divine realms; and the nexus of human social and political relationships. Now, however, Naram-Sin's objects are the body politic, encompassing and stretching the territory of the realm.

A *kudurru* is a boundary stele on which land sales are recorded (Gelb et al. 1991; Jonker 1995: 81–3). Naram-Sin's stelae *and* statues were boundary markers, delineating liminal spaces at the edge of his territory, regions where both symbolic meaning and political implications were loaded, and where the prospects of control diminished just as potential danger increased. Statues *and* stelae were equally the material embodiment of his person. That Mesopotamians did not necessarily conceptualize stelae and statues as ontologically different is evident in the fact that an Akkadian-period stele is designated as *alān*, the Sumerian word for statue, in its own inscription (Evans 2012: 112–13).²⁴ Moreover, this conjunction of statues and stelae as ontologically and functionally overlapping has Early Dynastic precedents. Selz (1997: 173) demonstrates that both statues²⁵ and boundary stelae embodying the gods either directly, when they are present in images, or indirectly, when it is as the gift of the gods that the boundary has been established, may be understood in the same terms, for textual evidence from pre-Sargonic Lagash shows that both could receive votive offerings as to the gods themselves. The Early Dynastic “votive” statues were also living and continual witnesses to land-sales (which may or may not have had a corresponding boundary marker). These pieces were “set up” rather than “dedicated” (Evans 2012: 122–23) as a kind of *naru* or *kudurru* (Braun Holziner 1991).²⁶ The difference between the Early Dynastic statues then and the images of Naram-Sin is fundamentally one of scale, of a transition from the local to the global in terms of territorial transaction, and in terms of social relationships. There is also an added dimension in that Naram-Sin's royal role as protector is highlighted. If we consider the statues and stelae of Naram-Sin both to be Naram-Sin and to be detachable from him, then very particular kinds of relationships are thereby established, relationships that give insight into the nature of his rule. His objects guard the edges of his world at the

²⁴ Evans points out though that this stele contains an image of a figure in the same style as the Early Dynastic statues and that it is perhaps this figure that is so labeled.

²⁵ The term ^d*alān* refers to all images however (Winter 1992: 169).

²⁶ Interestingly, many of the transactions recorded on the boundary *kudurrus* have an ancestral element in that owners, including previous generations, are compensated for their land with gifts (Gelb et al. 1991).

same time as they extend those edges. Those in independent polities and far-off places would, in the words of Erica Hill (personal communication), “likely be aware that in the process of viewing/experiencing these images of Naram-Sin they were embedding themselves in a network of domination that linked the entire kingdom.” His images are, in any analytical framework, the nexus between dual sets of relationships: on the one hand, Naram-Sin and the gods, and on the other, between Naram-Sin and the humans who engage with his representations in any capacity. Because, in addition, each object commemorates conquest, that they are detached parts of Naram-Sin’s own person effects the replication of those conquests under divine authority in new contexts, revealed in the location of each of these objects. Moreover, if Naram-Sin *was* deified in his lifetime, then the giving of the gift of the god Naram-Sin to two populations at the same time, one human, one divine, shatters the barriers between worlds at the same time as it opens the human components to great danger – a danger that only the power of Naram-Sin as protector can negate.

I would argue that acceptance of the gift of Naram-Sin wrought something far more intimate than a token obeisance to a potential military threat. The presence of these images, the recognition of their message on multiple levels, and, simultaneously, the captivating effect of their radical aesthetic would have worked an entirely different kind of relationship – one where the identity of the one was subsumed within the other. The question then is partibility. Admittedly, I know of no Akkadian text that describes the person as partible, connected by a series of internal relationships – relationships that are extended to others through the things that at the least duplicate components of the body, at the most *are* in fact the body. But Pongratz-Leisten (2011; also Selz 2008) describes the Mesopotamian view of the person as composed of distinct parts, while Bahrani (2008: 77–78) claims that Babylonians “saw the body as an assemblage of parts, or as a network,” extendible through sheddable biologic components, certain objects, and representations. Many Early Dynastic statues are themselves composite, with hair/headdresses, clothes and even limbs attached, different parts made of different materials and with different craftsmen executing the different components (Evans 2012: 124). Even when the bulk of the object is made of gypsum and not clad with precious metals, eyes, hair and sometimes nipples are added to the stone. There are also texts that use the language of the human body in describing certain vessels as “assemblages of parts” in the contexts of gifts from one polity to another (Archi 1999).

If “idea, behavior, and artifact are co-dependent” (Knappett 2002: 100), and people, objects and physical spaces are interconnected in networks of agency, working on each other, intersecting with other networks, then landscape, ideas of empire – both contested and acceded – personhood, object, subject, deity, all are networked together through the distribution of Naram-Sin’s images across space. The relationship I wish to describe here is not semiotic, Peircian, but is rather one of hybridity in the post-colonial sense. In the intersection of would-be ruler and potential subject through the image, whether that image is in the round or in relief (or even a name on a

brick), each brings their own understanding of image to the engagement. Each works on, and is worked upon by, the other. In this case, one medium through which this work occurs is the aesthetic. Naram-Sin's statuary and stelae present as the appropriate aesthetic described by Strathern. It might not be that Mesopotamians and their neighbors saw these pieces as stunning in the way that contemporary Western connoisseurs do, but they would certainly have seen them as stylistically disjunctive, at the same time as they would understand exactly what they were in functional terms. If, as Layton (2003) argues in his critique of Gell's (1998) rejection of the semiotic, art is interpreted by conventional understandings forged through the established recognition of symbols, what happens when something radical breaks those conventional understandings? The statues and stelae "actively constitute new social contexts" (Hoskins 2005: 75). They are "technologies of power" (Bernbeck 2008: 165). I think it reasonable to predict fascination, captivation and ultimately absorption. Thus, rather than outright conquest and overt military control, and whatever the local reality, Naram-Sin may have effectively claimed these northern lands as not just his own, but as inseparable from himself, through the means, in each place, of a single object.

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Paul Collins

Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Violence: Warfare in Neo-Assyrian Art

Abstract: Warfare is a significant theme in Neo-Assyrian art but it is limited to specific media and contexts, most famously as stone reliefs that once lined the walls of rooms and courtyards in Assyrian palaces dating between c. 870 and 620 BCE. Traditionally, these scenes have been interpreted as having mimetic and propagandistic functions, a selected historical reality intended to intimidate and astonish the viewer. The images are thus understood as visual representations of royal ideology: the successful fulfillment of the king's religious obligation to extend the lands of the god Assur, and a means to glorify the ruler as the embodiment of perfect kingship. Recent work, however, has begun to probe other levels of meaning embedded in the imagery. Among the areas explored are the role of Assyrian scholars in shaping the content of the imagery; the relationship between the violence of battle and that of the hunt; and the important part played by representation in royal ritual where it may have served to link the natural and supernatural world. Indeed, these visual statements of divinely sanctioned violence were themselves performative and essential components of the affective properties of the royal palace.

Keywords: gods, heroes, hunt, palace, performative, propaganda, reliefs, rituals, triumph, warfare

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Introduction

The Assyrians, perhaps more than with any other ancient culture, have been closely associated in the modern mind with warfare. This connection was established long before 1842 when excavations began to reveal the Assyrian capital cities.¹ Up until that time, Assyria had been understood in the West through the accounts of classical antiquity and the Hebrew Bible, with the result that by the early nineteenth century,

¹ The first popular reference to Assyrian warfare was Lord Byron's poem "The Destruction of Sennacherib." Published in 1815, it evokes the Hebrew Bible account of the Assyrian military advance against Jerusalem in 701 BCE.

Mesopotamia was imagined as “a site of sloth, sin, violence, and transgression” (Bohrer 2003: 49). Indeed, the discovery of royal inscriptions, administrative and religious texts and, most dramatically, visual representations of warfare in metal, stone, and paint appeared to confirm the existence of violent and absolute monarchs. The texts revealed that in the early centuries of the first millennium BCE Assyria expanded aggressively from the region of northern Iraq into neighboring territories and by the seventh-century BCE dominated a geographical area that stretched from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.² This was an imperial mission, and the achievements were represented in text and visual images with extraordinary detail: the artists glorified their king’s military successes, focusing on the events of war, including the humiliation, torture, and death of his enemies. Until relatively recently the carved and painted images were understood as non-verbal footnotes or mere embellishments to the written sources. Modern scholarship has, however, challenged this simplistic view, identifying many layers of meaning embedded in the visual representations of war. This chapter explores a few of these levels that are part of a wider and complex intersection between texts and images that combine Assyrian ideas of power and authority with those relating to both the natural and supernatural worlds. The evidence consists primarily of the monumental stone reliefs that lined the palace walls at Nimrud, Khorsabad and Nineveh, but also draws upon the repoussé bronze bands from palace and temple gates at Balawat and fragmentary remains of palace wall paintings from Nimrud and Nineveh.³

The scenes of warfare found in Neo-Assyrian art may be divided conveniently into three constituent parts: preparations and advance towards the place of violence; the violence itself – either a battle or siege; and the aftermath of war – a parade of booty and a celebration or triumph, which might include the execution of enemies and/or the destruction of their fortress. As Irene Winter (1981:12) has made clear, it is this “combination of sequence, action, and particularity” that distinguishes Assyrian representations of warfare from earlier Near Eastern examples. This narrative aspect is very clear in both the textual and visual accounts of war; in the latter it may take a variety of forms from “iconic” to “continuous” episodes, often combining separate moments of the action in a single scene. In addition, the artists created very believable worlds; conflict is not masked by treating it as set in mythical time and place, but rather actual historical events are described, albeit as heavily selected versions; “a self-censored selection of things that happened in reality” (Reade 2005: 7). The result is that scholars have largely utilized these images as sources for sociopolitical recon-

² General surveys of Neo-Assyrian history include Kuhrt 1995; Van De Mieroop 2005; Collins 2008b

³ For the stone reliefs see: Barnett and Falkner 1962; Barnett 1976; Albenda 1986; Barnett *et al.* 1998; Russell 1998. Wall paintings: Russell 1999; Nadali 2006. Balawat gate bronzes: King 1915; Curtis and Tallis 2008. Warfare is not a theme found in Assyrian carved ivories with a few possible exceptions (Mallowan and Glynne Davies 1970: nos. 55, pl. XVI; and 64, pl. XVIII), and these may be part of tribute scenes, which were favored by the ivory carvers.

struction in which they are read as visual copies of historical texts and evaluated according to their accuracy. Studies have focused on the discursive content of the images, such as narrative structure (Reade 1979b; Winter 1981; 1983; Russell 1993; Pittman 1996; Lumsden 2004; Watanabe 2004), or their formal aspects, such as compositional strategies (Albenda 1998), and as sources for understanding the organization of the army, its tactics and equipment (Reade 1972; 1976; Postgate 2001; Nadali 2005b; Dezsö 2006; Fales 2010).

Alongside their mimetic roles, the Assyrian representations of war are considered to have functioned primarily as propaganda, “designed to manipulate social forces” (Winter 1981: 22). They were “a sharp reminder of what happened to those who did not submit to Assyrian domination or who attempted to throw off the Assyrian yoke” (Curtis and Reade 1995: 32–33), and were intended “to inspire awe and reinforce the national self-image” (Reade 2005: 7). The identity of the intended audiences of these carved and painted scenes has been much discussed with suggestions ranging from foreigners on business in the palace to court officials.⁴ Since propaganda, at least in modern terms, involves the systematic dissemination of information over a wide variety of media, the Assyrian images of war would have had limited impact as they were restricted to the interior walls of palaces. Even here they may not have been easy to “read”; the small scale of the carved figures in relation to the height and gloom of the room, regardless of whether they were painted in bright colors, must have made the scenes difficult to appreciate without the aid of lamps and braziers, especially when visitors moved from the bright light of a courtyard into the darker interior spaces (Roaf 2008: 211). It may have been the very scale and complex design of the reliefs rather than their content that created a sense of awe and even confusion for visitors.⁵ Similarly, the detailed imagery and text on the metal bands on the palace and temple gates at Balawat, especially those above eye level, would have been virtually invisible. This is art that was difficult to see. In contrast, the walls of the courtyard that gave access to the throne room, perhaps a more public area of the palace, were decorated with scenes in stone relief or glazed bricks of human tributaries, supernatural figures and images of the king in a religious context (Reade 1963; Paley and Sobolewski 1997). Beyond the palace, the king was represented on free-standing monuments or carved on rock faces situated at sacred and historically important places or set up as markers of diplomatic encounters between Assyria and

4 Reade 1979c: 339; Winter 1981: 32; 1993: 31. Russell (1991: 223–40) identifies textual sources for the palace visitors and inhabitants. Holloway (2002: 74–76) concludes that there was no public audience exploited by the imperial image-makers, while Ataç (2010: 87–89) argues that, at least at Nimrud, the principle audience for the reliefs were the very scholarly officials who shaped their content.

5 While outsiders would have been unable to go beyond a sense of confusion and awe, those who identified with the imagery, that is, were initiated into its meaning, (the king, magnates, scholars, palace staff) participated in their affective properties.

foreign states.⁶ Here the monarch is presented not as a warrior but as the earthly representative of Assur, Assyria's supreme god (Reade 1979a: 32–35; Magen 1986: Taf. 7–11). Yet even these images were installed in places that were difficult to reach or carved in such low relief as to make them difficult to see. Propaganda and intimidation can be only partial explanations for the creation of these representations of war (and peace).

It would be an exercise in reductionism to treat the scenes of warfare as independent of other associated images. Representations of an Assyrian king at war on the so-called White Obelisk from Nineveh (probably eleventh century BCE) are accompanied by separate carved vignettes depicting him hunting wild animals, receiving tribute, and undertaking religious rituals.⁷ The organization of the scenes on the obelisk has been much discussed and although the primacy of any one scene is not immediately apparent, the longest registers, which wrap around the monument at the center, depict ritual libations (Pittman 1996). Indeed, Irene Winter's (1981) work on the Northwest Palace throne room reliefs of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) demonstrates the importance of considering Assyrian relief cycles in their entirety and, regardless of content, it is always the king who plays the principal role.⁸ Magen (1989) identifies 14 types or iconographies of royal-representations in Neo-Assyrian art: the king appears as hunter, builder, worshipper, cultic actor, and shepherd, and takes a variety of roles as commander of the army. Taken together, these have been understood as a visual representation of the ideology of kingship as expressed in the royal inscriptions, a means to glorify the king as the embodiment of perfect kingship achieved through the benevolence of the gods.⁹ The quasi-historical images of war are therefore intimately bound up with every aspect of the Assyrian worldview, including and most especially the supernatural realm.

The Divine Warrior

In Mesopotamia, weapons and the plundering of cities were considered as divinely bestowed aspects of civilization, and warfare was something that the most powerful

⁶ Porter 2000; Kreppner 2002; Harmanşah, 2007; Shafer, 2007; Radner 2010a. Although the primary visual medium of the Neo-Assyrian period was probably seals, worn and displayed, then replicated through their sealings (Winter 2000), representations of war are extremely rare and only a few seals have chariot scenes; Collon (2001: 59–60) suggests that these may have been owned by chariot drivers.

⁷ For the problems of dating the White Obelisk see Reade 1975.

⁸ Winter argues that the reliefs recapitulate in both content and structure Assurnasirpal II's "Standard Inscription" that is written over every slab, but this has been questioned by Roaf (2008).

⁹ See, for example, Reade 1979c; Liverani 1979. Winter (1997) demonstrates that visual representations of the Assyrian king convey an "official" stylized image of kingship rather than the likeness of an individual in the sense of western realism.

gods themselves engaged in.¹⁰ From at least the mid-third millennium BCE, representations of battle were a means through which myth (gods) and history (mortal kings) were integrated (Winter 1985; Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: 215–18). At Nimrud, Assurnasirpal's throne room reliefs focus explicitly on this relationship; the king is accompanied unambiguously by a god in a winged disk (together with chariots carrying divine standards) on the field of battle and also on his victorious return (Fig. 1) and celebratory review.¹¹ The deity and ruler adopt an identical pose, so that Assurnasirpal is a mirror of the divine. Indeed, Assyrian kings present themselves in both text and image as the very likeness of a god and through the Neo-Assyrian period they increasingly develop divine-like properties.¹² This relationship between armed aggression, the supernatural world and kingship is made explicit in the Coronation Hymn of Assurbanipal (669–ca. 631 BCE). The king is described as the image of the god Assur, and the deity provides him with a scepter to extend his dominion over land and peoples (Livingstone 1989: 26–28). Building on the achievements of their ancestors, Assyrian kings are defined in both texts and images by their military successes, but these are achieved only with divine support and direction. The intimate connection between gods and royal conquests has led Steven Holloway (2002) to develop a contentious idea that the expansion of Assyria was driven by religious imperialism with the expected outcome that subjugated people would accept Assur as their king; this interpretation has been challenged by, for example, Oded (1992: 187) and Fales (2010: 19, 69–94).

It seems very likely that the Northwest Palace reliefs incorporate many esoteric meanings (Roaf 2008: 209, 213). Perhaps designed by scholar-priests, the carvings may mask a complex philosophical rhetoric; Mehmet-Ali Ataç (2010) argues that the court artists and scholars interpreted versions of ancient religious and literary texts to create representations of the ideal.¹³ Through depictions of successful warfare, the

10 According to the Sumerian poem “Inana and Enki,” warfare is among the divine powers passed to the goddess Inana by the drunken Enki (ETCSL 1.3.1). Warfare within the divine sphere is represented most dramatically by the “Epic of Creation” (*Enūma Eliš*) in which a male hero-god (Marduk or Assur) defeats in battle the forces of chaos (Talon 2005). A relationship between the Assyrian king, the divine world and violence is highlighted in the Northwest Palace reliefs by fine incised designs on the king's robes, perhaps representing elaborate embroidery, that depict supernatural beings in combat (Canby 1971; Bartl 2005). Such images are also known in Assyrian metalwork (Curtis and Reade 1995: 124–5).

11 The deity in the winged disk should probably be identified as Assur, although Shamash, the sun god of justice, is another possibility (Collon 2001: 79–81). The divine standards may be those of Adad and Nergal (Reade 2005: 16).

12 Assurnasirpal is the first king since Naram-Sin to use the term “semblance” (*tamšilu*) in this context (Westenholz 2000: 110–111, n.56). For the god-like aspects of Neo-Assyrian kingship see Holloway 2002; Machinist 2006; Ornan 2007; Winter 2008; Radner 2010b: 16.

13 Ataç (2010: 83–144) considers possible metaphysical aspects of kingship, suggesting that Assurnasirpal is fundamentally presented as both god and human in his throne room reliefs.



Figure 1: Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) returns from a victorious campaign accompanied by a god in a winged disk. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, about 875–860 BCE, BM124551. © Trustees of the British Museum.

active support of the gods is made manifest, and this is especially evident by the visual interest in the king's weapons that, the royal inscriptions make clear, were granted to him by the gods (Bahrani 2008: 189–97). The bow was the most prestigious weapon used by kings throughout the Neo-Assyrian period.¹⁴ Other weapons wielded by the king, or by officials in close proximity to the monarch, have ritual or religious significance: maces (topped by divine rosettes), swords (decorated with images of lions), siege-engines (associated with powerful animals – see below), and perhaps even the royal chariot, horses and soldiers.¹⁵

The religious and esoteric nature of the imagery is less evident in reliefs of the mid-eighth century BCE onwards, when extended historical narratives depicting military violence and its aftermath, set within specific landscapes and accompanied by written captions, become the norm. (This development may, however, be more apparent than real given that comparable scenes are known from the ninth-century BCE gate decoration from the site of Balawat.) Nonetheless, the presence of the supernatural world remains important. For example, Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) reviews booty from the successful siege of Lachish while seated on a throne supported by rows of supernatural figures (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 335), and a divine standard with a deity ringed by stars (probably Ishtar) is mounted on the pole of Assurbanipal's chariot

¹⁴ The bow has been interpreted as a symbol of dominance when the Assyrian king is depicted holding it with the string turned outwards (Wilkinson 1991: 86)

¹⁵ Purification rituals were performed on weapons after battles, and temples could both house the weapons of the gods and rent out weapons for income (Magan 1986: 81–84; Heimpel 1996). For the religious significance of specific royal weapons see Ataç 2010: 104–105 (sword); Porter 2010: 145–48; and Collins 2010: 186 (mace).



Figure 2: An Assyrian fortified camp with tents and two priests standing beside an incense stand, table of offerings, and a chariot with divine standards. Southwest Palace, Nineveh, about 700–695 BCE, BM 124915. © Trustees of the British Museum.

during a campaign in Babylonia (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 207).¹⁶ The god-like nature of the monarch becomes more evident after around 700 BCE when the king is no longer depicted engaged in battle but he is situated at the end of the narrative and presented as the ultimate source of power, overseeing life and death; as the gods' substitute, chaos is apparent in the ruler's absence from scenes, while his presence signals the restoration of order.

Warfare is presented not only as a divine act that restores order to the world but also as an activity infused with ritual, even a ritual act in its own right, that maintains the essential relationship between the king and the gods. Julian Reade (2005: 15–22) has documented the variety of rituals that occur within a military context on the reliefs. Important among these are representations of fortified camps – perhaps a proxy for the ceremonial royal palace when the king was on campaign – that feature scenes of offering or sacrifice alongside ceremonial chariots and standards. These camp scenes, found in the reliefs of Assurnasirpal II, Tiglath-pileser III (744–722 BCE), Sargon II (721–705 BCE), and Sennacherib, include two priests shown standing side

¹⁶ A comparable standard is mounted between the heads of two horses on a chariot of Sennacherib; the chariot is positioned between the seated king and the military camp with its officiating priests (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 348).

by side and facing an incense burner and a table of offerings (Reade 2005: figs. 11–17). Some of these men may be involved in interpreting omens that have been provided by the gods in the specific shape and color of internal organs belonging to sacrificed animals. Divination, which Zainab Bahrani (2008: 183–88) identifies as one of the essential technologies of Assyrian warfare, was a means of knowing the past in order to change the present as a way of establishing a future that had already been determined by the gods in the past. These scenes of sacrifice are therefore often placed in close proximity to the king at the end of the narrative, where the past and future (linked via circularity) have been accomplished in the restoration of order by the monarch (Fig. 2).¹⁷

The Heroic Warrior

A mythological and heroic aspect of kingship lies at the heart of Assyrian representations of warfare. While the images may hold documentary weight and religious significance, the ever-victorious, heroic, and courageous king is a central concern; indeed, this can be recognized in Mesopotamian art as early as the Akkadian empire (Westenholz 2000). In the words of Assurnasirpal: “I am a hero, I am a warrior, I am a lion and I am virile” (RIMA 2: 195). It is this self-image that is depicted visually on his palace walls at Nimrud. Assyrian rulers presented themselves as the heroic kings they aspired to be and in so doing deliberately tied themselves to a mytho-historical past.¹⁸ For example, one of the earliest known versions of an Assyrian royal hero (13th century BCE) appears on a small, round, black stone lid from the New Palace at Assur, and combines a scene of battle and ritual that derives from both contemporary Assyrian and third millennium BCE Babylonian imagery (Moortgat 1969: 117–18; Collins 2008a: 21–22). Here again is a reference to the circularity of past and future as well as that of conflict and victory but, in this particular object, the imagery is arranged literally within a circular frame.¹⁹

Just as historical battles are portrayed in literary texts as the fight between a supernatural hero and monstrous rivals (Weissert 1997a: 197), so too might the

17 In the Northwest Palace throne room reliefs, the victory celebrations and the scene of omen taking are placed at the centre of the scheme rather than at the end, emphasizing the order reestablished by the king as the most important aspect of the narrative (Lumsden 2004: 369).

18 Texts and images were a means by which a heroic king’s name might be perpetuated for posterity and, since a person’s name was believed to be linked to their very essence, this ensured a continuation of the king’s spirit beyond death (Radner 2011a: 39–43).

19 On the stone lid action moves from left to right in the top register while, in the lower register, victory celebrations move from right to left, just as Winter (1981: 14) noted for the later Northwest Palace throne room reliefs. A similar use of direction to signal victory is found on the Til-Tuba reliefs from Nineveh in which the enemy Elamite king flees to the right but his severed head is carried in triumph across the field to the left (Watanabe 2004; Collins 2008a: 97).

carved and painted images of warfare be understood on mythological levels. The most interesting of such fusions of myth and selected reality involves two of the greatest masterpieces from the ancient Near East of the seventh century BCE: the literary Epic of Gilgamesh and carved stone panels depicting the battle of Til-Tuba and its aftermath (in about 653 BCE) from Nineveh.²⁰ There are clear parallels between the death of the demon Humbaba in the fifth tablet of the Epic and the death of the enemy king Teumman in the reliefs: both individuals are killed and decapitated in a woodland setting using a mace and axe; their severed heads are carried over long distances from a mountainous foreign land to Mesopotamia; and the heads are displayed at gateways and consecrated to the gods (Bonatz 2004: 100). The two Assyrian soldiers responsible for dispatching Teumman presumably stand in for Gilgamesh and Enkidu. We might have expected Assurbanipal to play the heroic role but, as indicated above, by the seventh-century BCE the Assyrian king is no longer portrayed in battle with humans – and it is known that he did not participate in this particular campaign. Nevertheless, Assurbanipal makes the claim in the epigraph accompanying the scene of decapitation that it was he who cut off the head of the Elamite king (Barnett *et al.* 1998: 95).

Military campaigns were the perfect vehicle to illustrate age-old heroic qualities and this could be demonstrated visually in a number of ways. The approach to battle took the army over long distances through varied landscapes that were used by the Assyrian artists to express territorial expansion and with it the incorporation of a potentially bountiful world (Marcus 1987, 1995; Thomason 2001); Assurnasirpal states how he depicted on the palace walls his “heroic praises, in that I had gone right across highlands, lands, (and) seas, (and) the conquest of all lands” (RIMA 2: 289–90). This was a world where heroes of the past had reached the Mediterranean Sea and washed their weapons, or ventured into mountains to discover resources and sacred places (Harmanşah 2007; Shafer 2007). It was, however, the overcoming of physical obstacles on these military campaigns that was especially important for the heroic image. Mountains presented no challenge to the king, who is shown effortlessly leading his army over the traditional scale patterns; the designers of Sennacherib’s reliefs make full use of their expanded canvases to depict deep valleys and rivers that have to be traversed (Fig. 3). The importance placed on overcoming the challenges presented by these landscapes is evidenced by the depiction of the crossing of a major river, probably the Euphrates, in a series of reliefs from the throne room of Assurnasirpal at Nimrud: while the Assyrian soldiers swim or float on animal skins alongside their horses, the king crosses the river in a boat, standing majestically in his war chariot (Gadd 1936: 134–35). The near nudity of the soldiers has been interpreted by Ataç

²⁰ For the Humbaba/Huwawa stories see George 1999: 39–54, 149–166. For the Til-Tuba reliefs see Barnett *et al.* 1998: pls. 286–319.

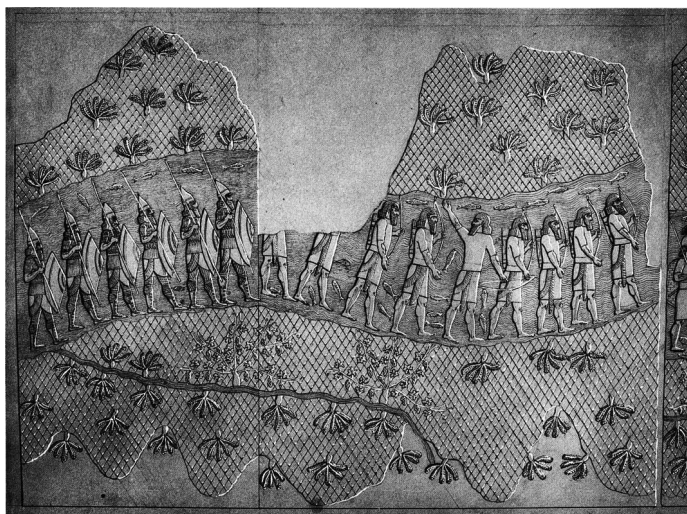


Figure 3: Drawing made at the time of excavation of a relief from Room XXXVIII, Southwest Palace, Nineveh, Or.Dr.I.43, BM2007,6024.45. © Trustees of the British Museum.

as reflecting the liminal state of these men, “between two shores, between safety and danger” (Ataç 2010: 22). Their nakedness might also indicate the ease with which the king leads his forces across the obstruction – the men are shown leisurely undressing and preparing the inflated skins in contrast to the enemies depicted on a relief panel from the same wall (at the same level but closer to the throne) who flee before the Assyrians by swimming fully dressed across a river (Curtis and Reade 1995: 48–49).²¹

Of all military operations the most significant impediment to a restoration of divine and royal order was the time it took to besiege a well-defended city (Fuchs 2011: 391). This might take months or even years but in the reliefs time is conflated to make the achievement a single event. In the ninth-century BCE imagery it is the Assyrian king who leads the attack on a city, but by the seventh century BCE, he views the event from a distance or is situated in an adjacent register on the relief. These sieges are presented as moments of frenetic activity since action is essential to underscore the dangers being confronted and overcome. Where historical events failed to deliver such excitement they were sometimes excluded from the decorative program of the palace in favor of those that did: for instance, Sennacherib’s blockade of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, in which no military action occurred,

²¹ Reade (2005: 20) suggests that this scene may be an example of Assyrian humor (see below). A comparable river crossing by Assyrian soldiers is represented on a series of Assurbanipal’s reliefs from Nineveh (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 192, no. 273a).

was ignored in favor of the visually thrilling siege and capture of Lachish (Nadali 2009).

The Heroic Hunter

The royal battle has been recognized as analogous in Assyrian art to the royal hunt: both are connected with ritual slaughter and trophies, and may to a certain extent be thought to involve sacrifice (Pongratz-Leisten 2007). This relationship is very apparent in the Northwest Palace throne room reliefs, where the representations of dying and dead bodies of lions, bulls and humans are interchangeable beneath the wheels of Assurnasirpal's chariot (Ataç 2010: 16). In the ninth century BCE, scenes of hunting are placed in visually significant locations: adjacent to the throne in the Northwest Palace and at eye level on the palace gate bronzes from Balawat (Curtis and Tallis 2008: 29).²² Lions in particular were closely connected with notions of kingship, sometimes on a mythological level (Watanabe 1998; Ataç 2010: 93), and these animals may have been hunted as ritual acts relating to military triumphs (Reade 2005: 20); figures wearing the skins of lions appear as part of the victory celebrations of both Assurnasirpal II (Fig. 4) and Tiglath-pileser III (Reade 2005: Fig. 19).²³ Although the image of the king killing a lion was circulated among state administrators through the official government seal from the ninth century BCE onwards (Millard 1965; 1976; Nadali 2011; Radner 2008), it is only with Assurbanipal that the royal lion hunts again figure significantly in both carved reliefs (North Palace, Nineveh) and wall paintings (Til Barsip).²⁴ Reade (2005: 24) suggests that Assurbanipal may have been reviving an antique ritual practice. If so, a connection with warfare and the hunt is also revived: Assurbanipal dedicates the dead animals to the warrior goddess Ishtar by pouring a libation of wine over their bodies (Collins 2008a: 134–35) just as he poured wine over the head of Teumman (Bonatz 2004: 96–98; Reade 2005: 21).

Similes and metaphors that connect animals with warfare abound in Assyrian texts, and the same appears to be true for the visual representations. A few examples will suffice: in Assurnasirpal's throne room reliefs, an eagle, symbol of bravery and fierceness, accompanies the divine standards into battle, and hovers above both the king and crown prince (or senior magnate) as they lay siege to a city; a fourth eagle carries an enemy's severed head before the divine standards (Fig. 4) and the triumphant

²² The Mamu temple gates do not show scenes of hunting; the focus is primarily on tribute-bearers (Curtis and Tallis 2008: 72)

²³ The lion garbed figures may be related to the god La-tarāk (Black and Green 1992: 33, 116)

²⁴ For the Nineveh lion hunts see Barnett 1976: pls. VI–XIII, XLIX, LI, LVI–LVII. The Til Barsip lion hunts paintings (reproduced in Parrot 1961: pl. 344) are dated by Reade (2005: 24) to the reign of Esarhaddon, while Albenda (2005: 71–73) prefers Sennacherib, for which see comments by Winter (2007a: 379), who favors Assurbanipal.

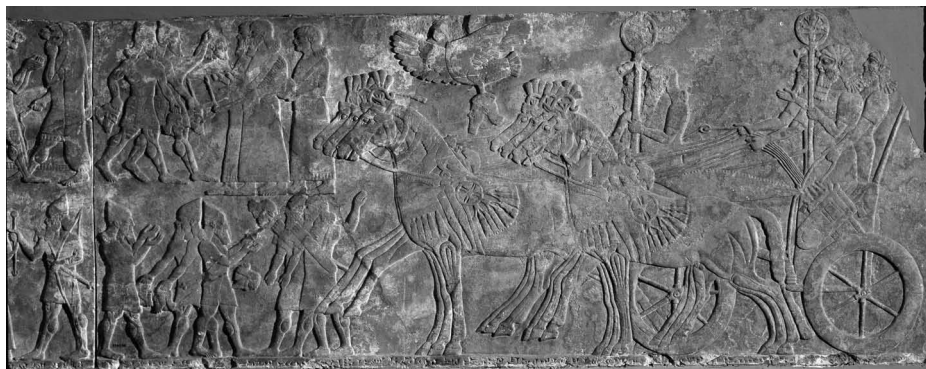


Figure 4: A victory parade includes a chariot with divine standards, soldiers playing catch with the severed heads of enemies, and figures dressed in lion skins. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, about 875–860 BCE, BM124550. © Trustees of the British Museum.

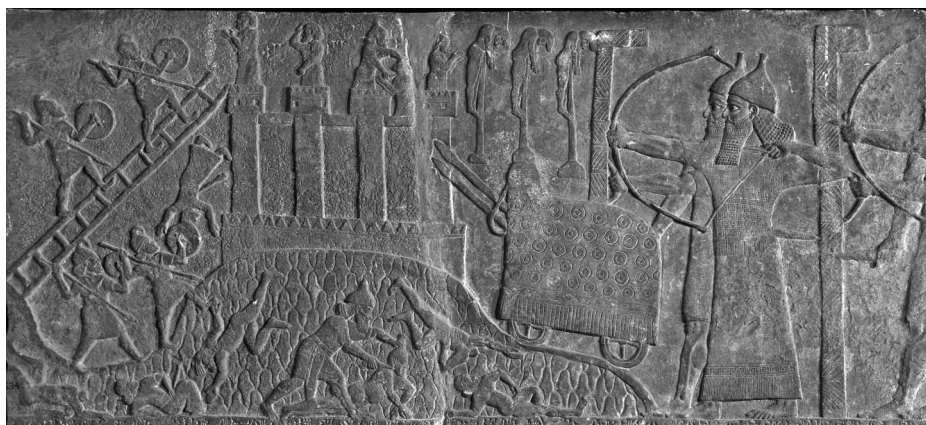


Figure 5: An attack by the army of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) on the city of U[pa?]. Central Palace, Nimrud, about 730–727 BCE, BM115634+118903. © Trustees of the British Museum.

king.²⁵ One of Tiglath-pileser III's siege towers is given the abstract form of an elephant, with two battering rams representing the animal's tusks (Fig. 5), while on one of the bronzes from the Balawat gates of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) a siege engine has the likeness of a crocodile (King 1915: pl. L). On scenes of the aftermath of war, people are paraded like herds and flocks (Cifarelli 1998: 220). Finally, in a relief of Assurbanipal, the capture of an Elamite king by the Assyrians is visually compared with a wild goat being stalked by a lioness (Curtis and Reade 1995: 80).

²⁵ For example, in the account of his accession to the throne, Esarhaddon tells us, "Like a winged eagle, I attacked in order to scatter my enemies" (Strawn *et al.* 2006: 354).

God's Enemies

Rebellion against or opposition to Assyria was understood as an attack on the god Assur and it was the king's duty to punish the blasphemers. Although the king, as the instrument of the gods, is the focus of the reliefs, the identity, differences and role of enemies within the narratives is of considerable interest to the Assyrian artists. It is clear that a number of visual markers were used to distinguish non-Assyrians from Assyrians: clothing, headgear, facial hair and hairstyle as well as types of military equipment. Marian Feldman (2011: 139) proposes that these were rendered in an Assyrian court style as a means of creating an imperial self-portrait through the depiction of otherness. These markers do not, however, identify these people *per se* as enemies of the state since non-Assyrians can appear in the reliefs as tributaries and increasingly, during the eighth century BCE, as members of the army (Nadali 2005a; Kaplan 2008). An enemy of Assyria is most recognizable by his actions (Bahrani 2006). This may occur in the context of a battle or siege itself – he will be shown as falling, crouching and running away from or being slain by Assyrian forces. Enemies can also be recognized in the aftermath of war as the individuals being tortured, executed, and shackled. That these moments were intended to be greeted with satisfaction, even enjoyed, by the audience of the reliefs is suggested by Julian Reade who points out that “most jokes in [Assyrian] narrative art... are provided by the problems, contortions and maltreatment of dead or doomed enemies” (Reade 2005: 20).

The narratives of battles and sieges focus on named enemies, perhaps a coalition of states or a single city or tribe, but often it is an individual rebel leader who is held accountable for provoking the Assyrian king to violence; they are marked out for a special appearance in the imagery and named in accompanying texts. For example, on one of Shalmaneser III's bronze bands from Balawat, the ruler of the rebellious city of Hamath in Syria, perhaps Urhilina, is depicted lying on a couch in his fortress while his army is being defeated by the Assyrians (King 1915: pl. 77). From the eighth century BCE, it is the punishment and execution of such enemy leaders that becomes a significant feature of the visual narratives. Following an attack on Hamath by Sargon II, some 150 years after Urhilina, the city's king Yau-bi'di was depicted on a relief at Khorsabad being flayed alive (Albenda 1986: 75, pl. 78). The scene parallels a description in the Assyrian royal annals and is emphasized on the relief itself by an epigraph identifying the victim and the method of his execution (El Amin 1954: 26–27). A comparable scene of execution is found in the reliefs of Sennacherib and Assurbanipal from the Southwest Palace at Nineveh (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pls. 339, 302). The later of the two images depicts the aftermath of the battle of Til-Tuba and shows the torture of two Elamites and two Babylonians; the nationality of the victims can be identified by their distinctive hairstyles. A text alongside the Babylonians informs us that they are being flayed and having their tongues torn out. A space has been left at the start of the inscription probably for the addition of specific names to

highlight the individuals involved.²⁶ By the seventh century BCE, this interest in the role of the individual enemy produces some startling innovations: they are given a voice in the epigraphs so that text and image together creates a believable personality, perhaps even a real presence (where the doubling of the victims may be of significance beyond historical accuracy, see below).

Under Assurbanipal (and perhaps earlier) certain groups of non-Assyrians are depicted with distinctive facial characteristics. This is especially clear in representations of Nubians and perhaps derives from the influence of Egyptian art (Albenda 1982). Other people are also defined by their physiognomies: two ambassadors from Urartu are distinguished by large hooked noses and high cheekbones (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 312). The Assyrians never used racial difference as characterized by physical features as a reason for violence against their enemies (Bahrani 2006); the interest in describing the physiognomies of certain “others” may be related to the intellectual developments of the seventh century BCE where the rationalization of data, especially in the field of divination, touched on all aspects of the natural and supernatural worlds (Rochberg 1999, 2004). This concern for recording the message-signs of the world led to the portrayal of individual enemies through their specific facial features. Of particular interest in this regard is the depiction of the Elamite king Teumman. In a total of ten representations he is consistently shown with a hooked nose, a sharp chin, a tightly cropped beard and, when he loses his distinctive hat, a prominent receding hairline with long rows of hair falling behind (Fig. 6).²⁷ Although he wears the Elamite royal robes, Teumman’s physical features may be an additional pictorial device to help single him out to the viewer. Nonetheless, Benjamin Foster has highlighted how in Babylonian literature the features of a person’s face and hair determined their character and even their success or failure in life: “Thin hair portended failure, while shaggy hair and a dark complexion betokened a villain. A long chin suggested a troublemaker. Qualities of leadership were thick hair and a handsome, radiant face” (Foster 2011: 121). With Teumman we see these notions translated for the first time into a visual medium. This includes the depiction of the king’s tightly closed eye that contrasts with the eyes that blindly stare from the majority of other severed heads on the battlefield and may be a depiction of the injury caused by a stroke or tumor that, according to Assurbanipal’s annals, had afflicted Teumman before the battle (Luckenbill 1927: no. 858). Bahrani (2008: 46–47) recognizes this as an ominous sign that was sent by the gods to announce Teumman’s inevitable doom. The result is in effect a visual portrait based on an individual’s (real or imagined) physical features.

²⁶ The names Mannu-ki-ahhe and Nabu-usalli appear on a cuneiform clay tablet in a variant of the same epigraph (Gerardi 1988: 13, n. 32).

²⁷ Teumman’s features are consistently depicted across two independent relief programs at Nineveh: the Til-Tuba reliefs from the Southwest Palace, and the famous “garden party” relief from the North Palace (Collins 2008a: 136–37); a further representation of Teumman’s head appears on a badly damaged relief from the North Palace (Place 1867: Pl. 41; Barnett 1976: pls. XXV–XXVI).



Figure 6: Teumman and his son fall from their chariot and flee into the woods during the battle of Til-Tuba. Southwest Palace, Nineveh, about 650 BCE, BM124801b. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Although the enemy is presented as cowardly, weak and evil, what the reliefs and captions of the Til-Tuba battle also emphasize is a warriors' death could be reputable and praiseworthy. Utakku, the in-law of Teumman, is portrayed as a valiant warrior who does not seek to escape but prefers to die an honorable death on the battlefield – he is clearly a foil to his cowardly relation. Utakku's request to have his head cut off might indicate this form of execution was limited to the elite and that he was worthy of the "honor" (Radner 2011a: 47), although the number of severed heads depicted in Assyrian scenes of battle and their aftermath might argue against such an interpretation.

The bodies of enemies (alive and dead) are important elements of victory parades and/or celebrations that signal the end of violence, often with more violence. Like the royal hunts, there is a strong ritual element to these events (Reade 2005). Three themes emerge: the humiliation, torture and execution of the enemy; the display and/or mutilation of the enemy's body or body parts; and a parade of booty.²⁸ Violence to the enemy at this stage in the narrative takes different forms and might involve impalement, dismemberment or flaying (Bleibtreu 1991). Like the destruction of a

²⁸ Banquets should also be considered as elements of victory celebrations (Reade 2005: 25–27; Radner 2011a: 53, n. 39)

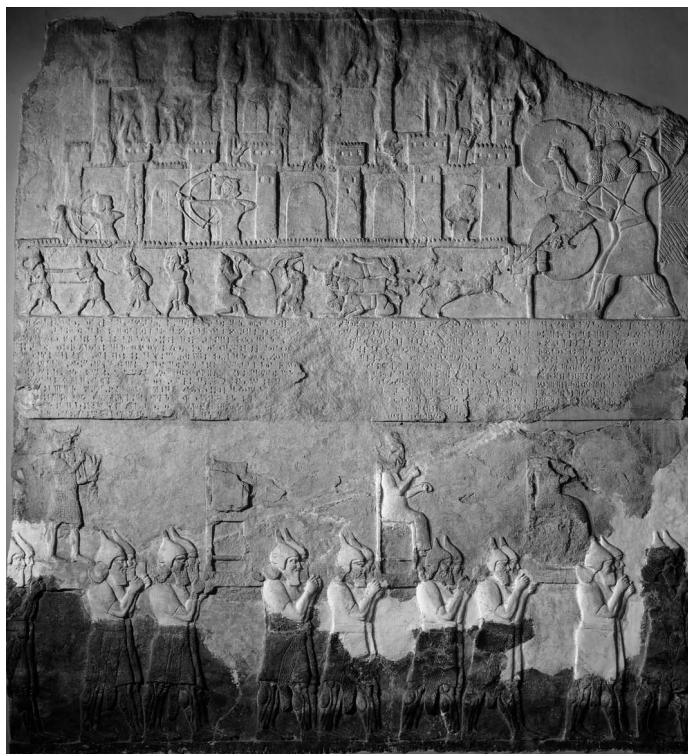


Figure 7: The siege of a city and Assyrian soldiers carrying captured statues of gods. Central Palace, Nimrud, about 730-727 BCE, BM118934.

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person's name, this was a way of obliterating their spiritual essence; Assurbanipal, for example, takes revenge on his enemy's ancestors by having their bones disinterred and ground to dust (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 289). One of the most significant forms of violence depicted in the reliefs is the decapitation of enemy combatants after which the heads become the focus of ritual and political attention, displayed in piles or used in the ritual humiliation of the defeated: Assurnasirpal's soldiers play catch with heads (Fig. 4), and Assurbanipal has the severed heads of his enemies suspended from the necks of other rebel leaders (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 306) while he personally mutilated the head of Teumman, perhaps to prevent him from receiving funerary offerings (May 2010: 109, n.6). As was suggested above in the example of Utakku, it is possible that only members of the enemy elite were decapitated; their heads were clearly trophies that are held aloft by triumphant Assyrian soldiers as evidence of the dead individual (Radner 2011a: 49–50). Bahrani (2004: 117; 2008: 41) argues that these heads should be understood as message-signs, at once the sign of a just war and also inevitable victory.

The ultimate triumph of the king over his enemies is represented by a parade of booty, which under Ashurbanipal appears to have been transformed into a national triumph tied to religious festivities (Reade 2005: 28). These events include long lines of men, women and children being marshaled by Assyrian soldiers. Counted like cattle, these people are not depicted as enemies but rather as part of the acquisition of wealth by the Assyrian king; they were once the material property of a defeated ruler and are shown on the reliefs alongside items of furniture, vessels, textiles and flocks and herds (Feldman 2011: 139).²⁹ Such parades might also include the cult statues of the enemy's gods, underlining the religious dimension of war that involved the domination of foreign cults by Assyrian deities (Fig. 7).

Warfare and the (Re)creation of Order

Vast amounts of materials and workers that were accrued by Assyrian kings as a consequence of military expansion (initially as booty and tribute, later as taxes) were invested in the creation of royal centers with extensive palaces. As Irene Winter (1993: 36) has argued, these palaces served as metonyms for the ruler and the state, “an integrated architectural, pictorial and textual representation of the institution of kingship and the ideal of the Neo-Assyrian state.” As we have already seen, the images of war play a significant role as the source and vehicle for the ideology of kingship and the state. As part of this, they describe the mechanism by which the palace, and by association the state, was created and maintained. Although royal inscriptions credit the Assyrian king with this role, it is very clear from the reliefs and contemporary archival texts that the ruler was at the apex of a collective of high officials (Radner 2011b). Directed by this group of men, tens of thousands of people were involved on a regular basis in military campaigns, either as soldiers or through the provision of their equipment and supplies. Enormous numbers of workers, especially prisoners of war and deportees from defeated regions, were drafted for the creation of the palaces. The buildings thus stand for the creative energy of the ruler. Sennacherib's reliefs at Nineveh highlight this through the depiction of a multitude of male prisoners of war, guarded by soldiers and directed by the king and his officials, hauling materials to create the very palace and sculptures in which they are displayed; the reliefs reference their own creation (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pls. 91, 96–126, 414–23). The result is a representation of a creative act at the center of the state using resources acquired through the defeat of chaos.³⁰ During the seventh century BCE if not earlier this

²⁹ The analogy of captive humans with captive animals in the Assyrian reliefs and inscriptions is taken by Cifarelli (1998:220) as a method of dehumanizing the non-Assyrians, but there is no visual evidence for this (Ataç 2010: 46–47).

³⁰ Russell (1991: 260–62) explains the layout of the Southwest Palace reliefs in relation to their perceived function as propaganda: in the public spaces were images of conquest that highlighted the

activity has the potential to be understood in a mythological dimension: in the “Epic of Creation” the forces of disorder are defeated by the god Assur (or Marduk in the Babylonian version) who then creates humans from the body of his enemy to become the workers who will construct his temple and work the land (Noegel 2007).

The Power of Images

The palace was the stage for a complex set of material strategies that maintained the state through a range of ceremonies and rituals involving the king and his officials. As part of the fabric of the palace, representations of war participated in these systems of practice and belief that were shaped by the building’s architecture and internal furniture and fittings (as well as the crucial intangible aspects lost to us: sound, smell and light/color); these all merged with the “human actors, extending and diverting their social agency beyond the physical confines of the body” (Wengrow 2007: 30). The wall reliefs and paintings were thus part of the socially affective properties of the palace, its psychological arsenal. They were also an index of royal agency, “making visual the verbal account of the ruler’s ability to act” (Winter 2007b: 50). With the gods as the prime agents (it is from them that the king received his power to act), the reliefs and paintings mediated the flow of agency from deities to the king and served as a link between the supernatural and natural worlds; by lining the walls of rooms they created liminal spaces within which the rituals of state might be effective. Indeed, like the figures that guarded the entrance to these spaces, it is possible that wall sculptures (and the gate bronzes) were themselves performative, that is “a means of effecting an apotropaic and invocational magic” (Bahrani 2008: 52).

The performative nature of representations of war and violence has been stressed by Zainab Bahrani, who considers that the Mesopotamians thought of visual images “not as imitating the natural world but as participating in it and affecting it in supernatural, even magical ways” (Bahrani 2008: 57). She identifies repetition as significant in this, so that the images act like the performative ritual statements in incantations that are repeated and built upon to achieve a magical result.³¹ The repetition of the severed head of Teumman in the Til-Tuba reliefs is therefore something more than just a narrative device (as when children tell a story, “and then, and then, and then”) but had for the Assyrians a real presence, “making the Assyrian victory inevitable and enduring... and replay[ing] itself into eternity” (Bahrani 2008: 52–55).³² In Mesopota-

risks involved in rebellion, while the images of construction in the more private inner parts were intended for insiders to show the benefits of good government.

³¹ Bahrani 2004. Michalowski (2009: 115–16) suggests that repetition of images in the reliefs would have been important for making the significant elements of the designs easier to “read” in rooms that were filled with people and objects.

³² For a detailed explorations of this concept see Bahrani 2002 and 2003

mia, Bahrani argues, images were perceived as living objects. Portraits of kings functioned as substitutes so that damage to these images represented a genuine attempt on the life of the living or dead ruler.³³ When Nineveh fell in around 612 BCE to invading Babylonians and Elamites it was therefore possible for them to take revenge on Assurbanipal (who had died some twenty years before) by defacing his image on the reliefs just as the Assyrian king had actually mutilated the head of Teumman.³⁴

It is unclear, however, how far this notion of substitution can be extended to all Assyrian visual representations.³⁵ Only certain classes of objects were conceived as having their own agency and this “was archived largely through ritual consecration, in a system that allowed for the ritual transfer of personhood and/or divinity into physical matter” (Winter 2007: 42). Thus substitute kings could be created through a ritual transfer of identity during times of danger for the living monarch (Parpola 2007: XXII–XXXII), and cult statues were accorded agency through ritual animation and were thereby targets for abduction during war just like living people (Fig. 7).³⁶ The calculated attack on the images of Ashurbanipal may be better understood as tied to the intellectual and political developments of the late seventh century BCE, especially in relation to Assyria’s relationship with Babylonia (Lambert 1997); under Assurbanipal, traditions were created and new religious texts were composed (Bonatz 2004: 99–100; Ataç 2004: 71). This was a time when representation moved beyond the abstract to the real (as suggested by the interest in Teumman’s physiognomy and the provision of a voice for enemies through captions), which may have served to perpetuate magically the death of the enemy and the victory of the king.

Conclusion

Assyrian visual representations of warfare have been traditionally viewed as reportage, celebration and propaganda. As with all ancient art, however, the palace wall

33 The notion that an image might act as a substitute for a specific king would seem to be at odds with an understanding that the royal *salmu* conveyed a stylized image of “kingship” (above note 9). It is perhaps the intersection of image and text that was crucial in establishing the individual substitute, since it is in the accompanying cuneiform inscriptions that the king (and his enemies) is named.

34 Iconoclasm and its meaning in ancient Assyria has been discussed by Nylander 1999; Bahrani 1995, 2004; Porter 2009; May 2010.

35 One wonders if images carved in stone, and thereby made to last, had greater performative qualities than those in more ephemeral paint. Did the magical presence created by imagery need to be cancelled ritually when, for example, Esarhaddon removed reliefs from the Central Palace of Tiglath-pileser III for use in his unfinished palace at Nimrud (Barnett and Falkner 1962: xiv–xv)?

36 Winter 1992, 2007b; Bahrani 2003. Irene Winter (2007: 42–43) warns us that “one must distinguish between agency ascribed by the analyst of a given work from agency marked by cultural practice, and even grammar, within the originating culture, if we are to fully understand the historical role(s) accorded the artwork.”

reliefs and paintings were created to function at a number of interrelated levels and carried complex political, ideological and esoteric messages and were filled with performative imagery. These visual representations were fully integrated into the lived experiences of the elite imperial classes and although, in a general sense, they convey the same messages across three hundred years of the Neo-Assyrian period, these images responded to and were informed by changing political developments and intellectual currents. The scenes of warfare represent a subtle fusion of history, myth and magic, and they were the medium through which the symbiotic relationship between the king and the god Assur was established. Since enemies had by their rebellious actions broken divine law, the gods were entitled (through the king) to undertake a just war against them. The reliefs and paintings on the palace walls thus presented an enduring image of a judgement against an illegal act and its proper punishment. In a sense the images helped to justify war (Bahrani 2006: 57); Assurbanipal, for example, depicts in his reliefs a scene where two Elamite nobles (witnesses) are required to show visiting ambassadors the insulting tablets (evidence) that initiated the war against Teumman and his allies (Barnett *et al.* 1998: pl. 312). Violence, as in so many societies, past and present, was thereby “sanctioned as an accepted, correct and even valorized form of behaviour” (Bahrani 2008: 12). This legitimized war as the lived experience and naturalized a worldview, bringing together in the social realm the institutionalizing powers of the Assyrian world: the gods and the king and their resources: humans, animals, plants and materials (Radner 2000). As Irene Winter has summarised, such images encoded propositions about existence (a divinely ordered world) and the action intended to change (restore) it: “the excitation generated by the work lies in the interaction between the two” (Winter 2007b: 62).

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Jean M. Evans

The Tell Asmar Hoard and Rituals of Early Dynastic Sculpture¹

Abstract: Current methodologies for approaching the sculpture found in Early Dynastic temples (ca. 2900–2350 BCE) are still entrenched in the ideas formulated around the early reception of these statues as artworks. The primary archeological reconstruction for the installation of statues in the Early Dynastic temple follows a model of the temple as museum vis-à-vis the display of sculpture. Focusing on the sculpture hoard from Tell Asmar, I argue that a consideration of archaeological context and textual evidence allows us to locate the agency of Early Dynastic temple sculpture beyond display before the divine. Statues were created through the act of dedication but they, in turn, assumed agency by shaping the acts of devotion in which temple visitors participated. That is, statues can be understood in relation to those who visited temples rather than solely in relation to the divine inhabitant. The visual culture of Early Dynastic statues is governed by the choice of abstraction, which resulted in a corpus of temple sculpture in a consistently recognizable form. Abstraction was a structuring element that facilitated, and gave direction to, the human encounter with the divine. As a material, physical form, the Early Dynastic temple statue had the potential to mediate social interactions among the realms of living, deceased, and divine.

Keywords: temple sculpture, Early Dynastic period, Tell Asmar sculpture hoard, Abu Temple, rituals, cultic installations

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Introduction

The Tell Asmar sculpture hoard is among the most recognizable Mesopotamian artifacts (Fig. 1). It was excavated in 1934 at the site of Tell Asmar, in the Diyala region east of Baghdad. Comprised of twelve statues buried together underneath a floor of the Abu Temple, the hoard dates to the Early Dynastic period (2900–2350 BCE) of Mesopotamia (Frankfort 1939). More specifically, the Asmar hoard is the earliest-stratified corpus of

¹ A more comprehensive treatment of the Early Dynastic temple statue is Evans 2012, upon which the present study draws.



Figure 1: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard. The statues in the hoard are now divided among Baghdad, Iraq Museum; Chicago, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago; and New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. From Frankfort 1935a: fig. 63. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Early Dynastic temple sculpture (Evans 2007). Some 550 surviving examples of Early Dynastic temple sculpture belong to a type referred to variously as dedicatory, worshiper, or votive sculpture (Braun-Holzinger 1977, 1991). These statues are with few exceptions only found in temples, and it is only in the Early Dynastic period that they are found in such abundance. Inscribed Early Dynastic statues reveal that sculpture was dedicated by individuals who, although of an elite class, were not royal. Countless other statues are not inscribed. At no other time in the history of the ancient Near East has the sculpture of private individuals survived in such abundance.

Upon its discovery in 1934, the sculpture in the Asmar hoard was proclaimed the oldest monumental stone sculpture in Mesopotamia. Its geometric forms, which abstracted the component parts of the body, were contextualized at the origins of a world art history. The early reception of Early Dynastic sculpture in general emphasized formal analysis. This methodological approach has persisted to present day. Early Dynastic statues consequently are treated in temple reconstructions as artworks on display, divorced from a fuller exploration of their life history in the Early Dynastic temple. I argue here that we must shift our thinking on Early Dynastic statues to a

consideration of the activities surrounding them. In doing so, the visual culture of these statues can be contextualized in the temple contexts from which they were retrieved.

The Early Twentieth-Century Reception of the Asmar Hoard

The Asmar hoard is the subject of a famous photograph, which is also among the most recognizable Mesopotamian artifacts (Fig. 1). In the 2003 exhibition *Art of the First Cities* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,² the photograph was blown up to occupy one wall of a small room in which only Early Dynastic sculpture was displayed. The dimensions of the room approximated that of a Mesopotamian sanctuary, and one entered through the reconstruction of a niched temple façade. The dim lighting of the room required that the photograph of the Asmar hoard be lit in the same manner one would light objects. One of the Asmar hoard statues was in a nearby display case, overshadowed by its own image in the photograph.

The photograph of the Asmar hoard has been reproduced countless times because it represents the only document recording the statues all together. As such, the photograph captures a moment in time before the statues were divided among collecting institutions. Through the division of finds, five of the statues were sent to the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago – which sponsored the Iraq Expedition to the Diyala region – at the end of the 1934 field season.³ The remaining seven statues were sent to the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. In 1940, one of the statues entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art by exchange with the Oriental Institute Museum.⁴ The Asmar hoard photograph therefore documents a point in the life of this artifact group just prior to the fragmentation that occurred shortly after excavation. It is one-of-a-kind: it is unlikely there will ever be another Asmar hoard photograph.

The Asmar hoard photograph is an iconic image, but it is not a neutral record of a material assemblage. The photograph is composed differently from the manner in which a photograph of other artifactual assemblages, such as pottery, would be composed. If the statues had been arranged in a single row, for example, one could better gauge their relative size. The grouping also obscures a full view of some of the statues. Instead, the Asmar hoard photograph represents an aesthetic arrangement of

² I participated in the organization of this exhibition when I was a Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art.

³ For the policies regarding the division of finds in early twentieth-century archaeology in Iraq, see Bernhardsson 2005.

⁴ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1940 (40.156).

twelve statues. With the largest statues at the center, the composition creates a monument of the group. Consequently, the photograph reinforces the interpretation of the statues as artworks. Even a self-described archaeological museum such as the Oriental Institute Museum touts its Early Dynastic sculpture as “one of the highlights of Mesopotamian artistic achievement” (Oriental Institute Museum 1982: 14).

The predilection to receiving the Asmar hoard as an artwork is reinforced by typology. That is, the hoard is comprised of stone sculpture. Stone sculpture is, traditionally, a fine art. When the statues were first discovered, the medium made a great impression. Henri Frankfort, the director of the Iraq Expedition, assumed the responsibility of publication. Based on what was known at the time about Egyptian sculpture, Frankfort maintained that “the human figure was for the first time sculptured in the round in stone for a monumental purpose” in the third millennium BCE. As the earliest stratified corpus of “monumental stone sculpture” in Mesopotamia, Frankfort believed that the Asmar hoard could provide “an understanding of the phenomenon of art itself” (Frankfort 1939: 1). The Asmar hoard consequently formed the “foundation of all sculptural achievement” (Frankfort 1935b: 121; see also Frankfort 1936: 41; 1939: 18, 39–40; 1943: 1).

The style of the sculpture in the Asmar hoard, in which bodily forms are abstracted, was understood as a geometric style. That a geometric style would stand at the origins of art was well established before the discovery of the Asmar hoard.⁵ Beginning in the nineteenth century, it was a widely-held assumption that art had evolved from its primordial origins in abstract, geometric forms. The abstraction of the Asmar hoard resonated further with an early twentieth-century aesthetic sensibility that had already embraced abstraction in so-called “primitive” art. Fundamental shapes, masses, and forms as well as expressions of power, vigor, and spontaneity comprised the commonly utilized, collective vocabulary of abstraction in art. In the early twentieth century, this same vocabulary was used to describe Early Dynastic sculpture in general and the Asmar hoard specifically.

It is not a matter of whether the sculpture in the Asmar hoard has geometric or abstract forms *per se*. At issue here, rather, is that since its discovery, the primary mode of reception for the sculpture in the Asmar hoard has been aesthetic. As a result, these statues are divorced from a fuller exploration of their use and meaning in the Early Dynastic temple. Inscribed examples indicate that the most common request to accompany the dedication of an Early Dynastic statue was for a long, healthy, and prosperous life for the donor. Through dedication, the donor therefore sought the benevolence and protection of the resident deity of a temple. Early Dynastic statues, it is therefore commonly argued, were displayed in the sanctuary so that as representations of the donor they could perform, with clasped hands, an eternal prayer before the divine.

⁵ For a full discussion of the reception of the Asmar hoard, see Evans 2012.

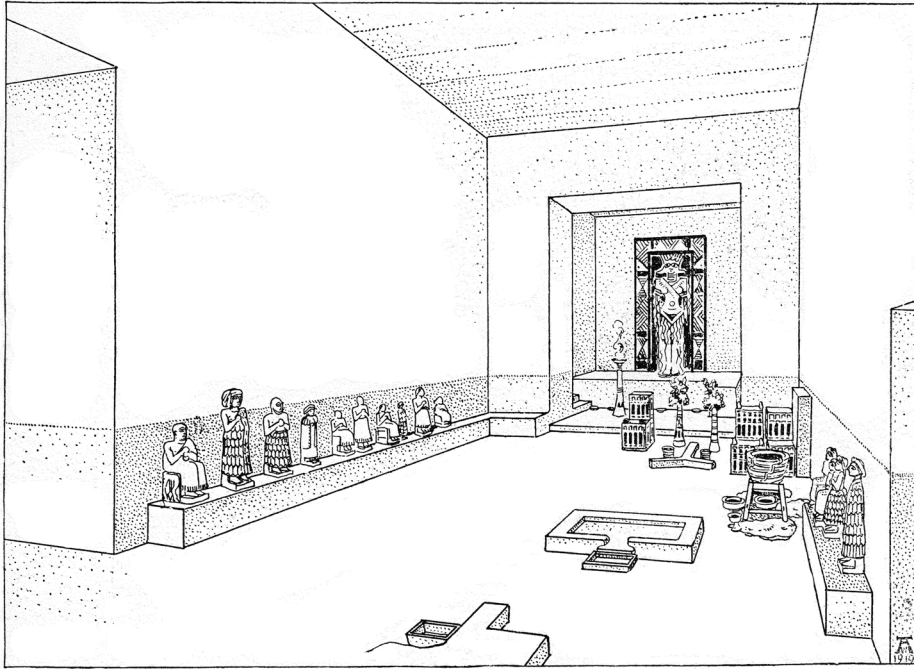


Figure 2: Walter Andrae, 1919 reconstruction of Ashur, Ishtar Temple G sanctuary.
From Andrae 1922: Taf. 11a.

Thus, the primary context of Early Dynastic sculpture has been reconstructed as a display set against the long walls of the temple sanctuary (Fig. 2).⁶ The practice of isolating objects for attentive looking, however, resonates more with methods of museum display rather than with archaeological evidence.⁷ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the dominant display model for sculpture was its installation against the long walls of museums (Jenkins 1992: figures 46, 47, 90; Moser 2006: 79). Displayed in static rows against the long walls of the most important part of the temple and set in isolation from other temple objects, Early Dynastic statues were reconstructed as *objets d'art*, performing the exhibitionary setting of the museums for which they ultimately were destined.

⁶ Walter Andrae, the excavator of Ashur who produced the reconstruction of sculpture display in Ishtar Temple G at Ashur, would have been well acquainted with standard practice in museum display. When the final report for the early levels of the Ishtar Temple was published, Andrae already had been appointed Curator of the Near Eastern Department of the State Museums in Berlin. He later became director of the Near Eastern Department of the National Museums and oversaw the installation of the collections. See Andrae and Boehmer 1989.

⁷ For what has been dubbed a museum “way of seeing,” see Alpers 1991.

These archaeological reconstructions have remained a part of our modern scholarship, even though Early Dynastic statues were never actually found set up for display as such. Like the Asmar hoard, many Early Dynastic statues were hoarded and buried in temples. Other statues were built into the mud brick architecture and cultic installations of temples. Still other Early Dynastic statues were found in various locations throughout the temple rather than in the sanctuary. If we dismantle the exhibitionary context of Early Dynastic sculpture, a fuller consideration can be given to the textual and archaeological evidence for rituals of sculpture.

Dedicating Sculpture in the Early Dynastic Temple

Why was sculpture dedicated in such abundance during the Early Dynastic period? Mesopotamian temples, in general, were not places of communal worship (Oppenheim 1944: 56, 60; Jacobsen 1976: 16; Lambert 1990: 118; Meijer 2002). Although it was the focal point of the temple, the sanctuary was often positioned at the back of a building architecturally subdivided into a sequence of small spaces. The bent-axis plan typical of the Early Dynastic period required a 90-degree turn in order to approach the altar, the focal point of the sanctuary, thus obscuring a view from outside of the room. The sanctuary itself was accessible probably only to a limited few who catered to the special needs of the god. As a small space filled with mud-brick furniture, such as altars, benches, and tables, in practical terms large numbers of visitors could not have been accommodated in the sanctuary (Crawford 2002: 48–49; Hansen 2003: 29). Therefore, one theory why so many people dedicated statues to temples in the Early Dynastic period has to do with overcoming this restricted access.

A small number of Early Dynastic temple statues have inscriptions in which the name for sculpture is written in Sumerian as *al* and in Akkadian inscriptions with the logogram *ḏUL* or more rarely *AN.ḏUL*; all are equated with the Akkadian *šalmu* in later lexical lists (CAD *š*, s.v. *šalmu*). According to the ideology of Mesopotamian image-making, the *šalmu*, as a representation, bore some quality or essence of the individual represented.⁸ A Mesopotamian image, however, was not the represented *per se*. Here, the concept of the Early Dynastic temple statue as a physical, material object distinct from the donor is important. The act of dedication permitted entry to the statue. That is, dedication allowed the statue to do that which the donor could not do. Symptomatic of this quality of separateness, the temple statue participated in cultic activities after dedication to the temple had occurred.

⁸ A large body of literature grapples with the ideological and semiotic significance of the Mesopotamian image; for example, see Morandi 1988: 105–106; Beran 1989; Winter 1992: 15; 1997: 364–69; Bonatz 2002; Bahrani 2003: 121–48; Feldman 2009: 46–48.

For example, textual evidence from the late Early Dynastic e2-mi2 (“house of the women”) archive of the city-state of Lagash indicates that Early Dynastic temple statues were the recipients of offerings when the queens of Lagash visited temples on the occasions of festivals (Genouillac 1909: TSA 1; Förtsch 1914: DP 53, DP 54, DP 66, Ni. 23; see also Marchesi and Marchetti 2011: Appendix B). Dates and oil were the most frequent offerings to statues. Thus during the malt-eating festival of Nanshe, the late Early Dynastic queen Baranamtara of Lagash made offerings of dates and oil to an alan of Urnanshe, the earliest-attested ruler of Early Dynastic Lagash, as well as to “the alan of the inner room, of which there are eight” (Förtsch 1914: DP 53). Later, Sasa, another late Early Dynastic queen of Lagash, made offerings to an alan of Baranamtara as well as to her own alan during the festival in the courtyard of the temple of the goddess Bau (Förtsch 1914: DP 54).

In the latter example, one can assume that the statues were present in the courtyard since the festival was located there. More generally, archaeological evidence demonstrates that entrances, courts, and small rooms are archaeological contexts that reveal aspects of the life of Early Dynastic temple statues. Thus, both textual and archaeological sources indicate that statues were not always sequestered in the most sacred part of the temple – the sanctuary – where access was limited to the few who catered to the needs of the god. Rather, statues were available to receive offerings in more accessible parts of the temple where they were encountered by an audience larger than that of solely the divine. Statues therefore represented more than the eternal prayer encoded by the donor in the dedication of a statue to a temple. The act of dedication, which constitutes a social relationship between the donor and the statue, thus did not necessarily encompass the entire functional range of the statue itself.

If we wish to understand the Early Dynastic phenomenon of dedicating sculpture to temples, then we must shift our thinking to a consideration of the activities surrounding temple statues. The offerings discussed above made by the Early Dynastic queens of Lagash highlight the extent to which temple statues were tended by individuals who were not the donor. The example of queen Sasa cited above is the only time in the Lagash texts when a queen of Lagash made an offering to her own statue. The queens of Lagash instead made offerings to statues of donors who were still alive and to donors who were deceased. Offerings to statues therefore formed a social practice that existed beyond the donor. Outside of the sanctuary, temple statues became available to, and were encountered by, a wider audience. Rather than simply being installed in the sanctuary, where temple visitors could not go, statues instead negotiated the very terrain of access.

Offerings to statues representing both living and deceased individuals can be related conceptually. Temple statues acted as intermediaries between the human donor and the divine because they communicated a dedicatory request (Gelb 1956: 69). In a similar manner, temple statues also acted as intermediaries between the temple visitor and the divine. As the Lagash texts indicate, the social practice of

tending to alan was one instance in which visitors – in the examples here, royal visitors – were present in the temple. The tending of statues thus created a focal point for offerings that mediated between the visitor and the divine. The tending of statues of deceased individuals would suggest that statues also created a focal point for offerings that mediated between the living and the deceased. In all these instances, this was something that only the temple statue – and not the individual represented by the statue – could do.

The offerings in the Lagash texts to statues simply described as alan without mention of the individuals represented would seem here also to be significant. These references indicate that temple visitors tended statues even when the identity of the represented individual was unknown. In these instances, the alan was the focus of cultic activities *because* it was recognizable as a specific type of dedicatory object. That is, the visual image of a frontal human figure with clasped hands denoted a category of temple object that was significant regardless of whether or not it was inscribed and regardless of whether or not the identity of its donor was known. Following this line of reasoning, the temple statue would have been the focus of cultic activities because of its visual appearance. The appearance of the Early Dynastic temple alan specifically as a statue of a frontal human figure with clasped hands therefore was critical for its life inside the temple.

When it is recognized that Early Dynastic temple statues in fact could be placed outside of the sanctuary, they become available to, and encounter, a wider audience. This brings us back to the quality of abstraction that is characteristic of the corpus. Abstraction created consistency. Consistency facilitated the generation of the social bonds through time and space that were mediated by the material presence of the alan. One significant factor underlying the abstraction of Early Dynastic sculpture therefore was likely the desire for a consistently recognizable form that signified a temple statue to a greater degree than it signified a specific human donor. The Early Dynastic temple alan as a physical object therefore is fundamental for understanding its life inside the temple.

Rituals of the Asmar Hoard

Taking into consideration the observations made thus far, what can we say about the emergence of the temple sculpture tradition vis-à-vis the Asmar hoard, the earliest stratified corpus? The agency of the Asmar hoard statues can be localized relative to the archaeological record, which suggests that the cultic need for a depiction of the human form was stimulated by a shift in temple rituals. The statues therefore can be contextualized within a sphere of cultic activities in a manner analogous to those surrounding the sculpture recorded in the Lagash texts discussed above.

Some of the statues in the Asmar hoard depict figures holding vessels. The iconography of a standing figure holding a vessel is rare in the Early Dynastic sculpture



Figure 3: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard, statue of a kneeling belted hero with clasped hands. Baghdad, Iraq Museum IM 19767. Frankfort 1939: pl. 26, no. 16 (As. 33:443). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

corpus.⁹ The vessel type held by these figures resembles a ceramic type known as the solid-footed goblet.¹⁰ In a level of the Abu Temple preceding the burial of the Asmar hoard, solid-footed goblets were deposited by the hundreds in a small room adjacent to the sanctuary (Delougaz and Lloyd 1942: 165–66). The appearance of solid-footed goblets in mass quantities coincided with the first appearance of provisions for liquid offerings on the sanctuary altar. Solid-footed goblets therefore likely were used for pouring libations on the altar (Wilson 1994: 68).

In the Diyala region, a small number of ritual containers in the form of three-dimensional sculptures of kneeling and crouching figures are contemporary with solid-footed goblets (Frankfort 1939: nos. 11, 92; 1943: no. 269).¹¹ The most important example is the kneeling figure from the Asmar hoard (Fig. 3). Nude but for a belt of four strands encircling the waist, the figure functions as a support, literally wearing a hollowed-out head in the shape of a small vessel, the rim of which is not preserved (Frankfort 1939: 12). Although the hands are clasped, the kneeling figure is different from the other figures in the Asmar hoard not only because it functions to support a vessel but also because it is carved entirely in the round with the underside articulated. The fleshy forms of the modeled legs are also incongruous with the Asmar

⁹ Only one other example is known outside of the Asmar hoard: a fragmentary female figure from the Shara Temple (Frankfort 1943: no. 265).

¹⁰ Hrouda 1971: 112; Behm-Blancke 1979: 57; Porada *et al.* 1992: 105. Braun-Holzinger (1977: 44) maintains that a solid-footed goblet is depicted only with the Shara Temple sculpture fragment, where the vessel has the characteristically narrow foot and string-cut base clearly articulated.

¹¹ The fragmentary state of the kneeling figure in the Asmar hoard might indicate that it is older than the other temple statues with which it was buried. However, it is the stratigraphic context of a crouching figure from Sin Temple VI–VII at Khafajah that definitively dates these statues of kneeling and crouching figures (Frankfort 1939: no. 92); the Sin Temple VI–VII figure is roughly contemporary with the large quantities of solid-footed goblets deposited in levels V and VI and is earlier than the first corpus of temple sculpture in Sin Temple VIII.

hoard, as is the medium of semi-translucent, amber-hued alabaster from which the kneeling figure is carved (Frankfort 1939: 25). Most importantly, the kneeling figure is not a human figure. Rather, it is a semi-divine, mythological “belted hero” (Wiggermann 1983; 1992: 164–66).

The function of the kneeling and crouching figures from the Diyala temples might be related to the cultic activities associated with solid-footed goblets. Like solid-footed goblets, the statues of belted heroes are containers. The articulated undersides of these figures suggest that, as containers, they were meant to be held in the hand like solid-footed goblets. The articulated underside of sculpture in general is associated with its potential handling in rituals (Porada 1981: 499).¹² A statue carved fully in the round would be visible from many viewpoints. When tipped to pour a liquid, the underside in particular would become visible. Perhaps the belted heroes are elaborate versions of solid-footed goblets, to be held by certain temple visitors or personnel in the performance of libations.

Regardless of how we ultimately understand their function, the kneeling and crouching figures discussed here are important because they indicate that a different style of sculpture was in circulation just before the temple sculpture tradition sees its beginnings with the Asmar hoard. These kneeling and crouching figures then drop out of the material assemblage. The representation of the donor as a frontal human figure with clasped hands becomes the norm. When representation shifted in favor of the donor image, temple sculpture became defined in contrast to the cultic equipment that had preceded it. Instead of the modeled forms associated with kneeling and crouching figures, abstraction was adopted. Instead of being articulated fully in the round, the sculpture figure is set upon a base, a discrete platform on which the figure stands. Represented frontally, the figure is no longer a piece of ritual equipment to be viewed entirely in the round. These shifts, understood here as deliberate, subsequently characterized the Early Dynastic temple sculpture tradition for hundreds of years.

Locating the Asmar Sculpture Hoard

If we are correct in understanding that the location of hoards suggests something of the original location of the objects they contain, then the rituals associated with the Asmar hoard are further suggested by its location in the Abu Temple. As is often observed, the statues were buried so far below the Square Temple floor level with which they were initially associated that they should probably be associated with an earlier level (Hrouda 1971: 112; Behm-Blancke 1979: 57; Tunça 1984: 192; Marchetti

¹² With the kneeling figure in the Asmar hoard, two small copper loops on the belt in the back might have facilitated its handling; see Frankfort 1939: 25.

2006: 26–27; Evans 2007: 621–25). The precise stratigraphic location of the Asmar hoard, however, is difficult to determine. In earlier levels, the space in which the hoard was buried comprised the entrance to the Abu Temple. Were the statues in the Asmar hoard originally set up at the temple's entrance? There, the statues conceivably would have functioned not only as objects of dedication, but as the agents for potentially countless offerings from visitors who encountered the statues at the temple entrance.

The archaeological record supports statues being positioned at the entrances of Early Dynastic temples. In Ishtar Temple G at Ashur, for example, the largest quantities of sculpture are concentrated near or on the stone threshold of the sanctuary entrance and at the two entrances to the temple proper (Andrae 1922: 62). At Tello, what is most likely a fragmentary statue base was found on the stone pavement at the entrance to the so-called Construction Inférieure, identified as an Early Dynastic temple (Crawford 1987: 71). At Nippur, to cite a final example, Early Dynastic sculpture was found on the bitumen-coated brick pavement beside an installation for liquids just inside the secondary entrance to level VIIB of the Inanna Temple.¹³

At Nippur, the association of sculpture with an installation for liquids recalls in concept the standing figures holding cups in the Asmar hoard, which are associated here with libation. That an association with liquids remains a tangible aspect of the Early Dynastic temple sculpture corpus in general can be supported by other contexts as well. At Khafajah, for example, almost half of the Sin Temple VIII sculpture was retrieved from room R 42:2, which contained additional objects as well as a large vat. The excavators associated the vat with liquid storage for libations because in the subsequent Sin Temple IX the room yielded three vats as well as a spouted copper vessel of the type depicted in Early Dynastic libation scenes (Delougaz and Lloyd 1942: 58, 69–70).

The disappearance of ritual containers such as solid-footed goblets and kneeling and crouching figures in the Early Dynastic temples in the Diyala region suggests a shift in cultic activity: an individual who participated in cultic activities like pouring libations is replaced by a statue of such an individual. Solid-footed goblets are ritual containers, but statues of standing figures either holding cups or clasping the hands are the actors in ritual. During the time of the e2-mi2 archive at Lagash, temple statues are the recipients of offerings of dates and oil. Perhaps we can imagine similar offerings that would have allowed the Asmar hoard statues to become the agents of cultic activities performed on behalf of the visitors who encountered these statues at the entrance to the Abu Temple. The standing figures in the Asmar hoard holding cups are rather unusual, and the dedicatory guise of a frontal figure with clasped

¹³ Full publication of the Inanna Temple excavations is being prepared by Karen Wilson, Richard L. Zettler, Robert D. Biggs, and the present author under the aegis of the Nippur Publication Project directed by McGuire Gibson. The field numbers assigned to the statues during excavation will allow these objects to be identified in the forthcoming publication: 7 N 82, 7 N 83, 7 N 84, 7 N 85.

hands subsequently became the norm. Certain contexts, such as those discussed above, demonstrate that temple sculpture nevertheless retains an association with cultic activities involving liquids.

Sculpture as Ritual: Donor Identity in the Asmar Hoard

When first excavated, the largest figures in the Asmar hoard (Fig. 4) were identified as deities principally on the basis of size, enlarged eyes, and identifying elements on the base (Frankfort 1939: 22). Although missing the head, the relief-carved image on the base of the male figure preserves a bird grasping quadrupeds. Frankfort reconstructed the bird as the mythical lion-headed Imdugud and proposed that the largest male figure was a cult statue of the god Abu complemented by the symbolic form of the deity on the base (Frankfort 1939: 13–16).¹⁴ Similarly, the fragmentary feet and base of a small figure set into the base of the largest female figure were understood as an identifying feature. The feet and base were reconstructed as a long-haired and beardless standing male figure, which is how the excavators imagined a child would be depicted. The combination of a large female figure with a child seemingly confirmed the purely conjectural identification of a mother goddess. The smaller statue set into the base of the standing female figure is indeed unusual. There are no examples of children represented in Early Dynastic temple sculpture, however, thus making this reconstruction dubious. It is likely that the exposed breast of the largest female figure also suggested the mother goddess identification prevalent among prehistoric clay figurines of nude females. The concept of a universal “mother goddess” is no longer considered viable. The identification of the largest male and female figures in the Asmar hoard as deities is no longer accepted.¹⁵

One difficulty in determining the identity of these figures is that they stand at the beginning of the Early Dynastic temple sculpture tradition. The largest male figure, for example, still bears vestiges of the kneeling belted hero in the hoard. Although now clothed, an unusual double-stranded belt encircles the waist. The hair is loose, rather than falling forward on either shoulder as is customary among other male figures in the temple sculpture tradition. Nor is the largest male figure a precisely frontal representation. Rather, a slight twist in the upper body shifts the right shoulder forward, evoking the sense of movement represented among the earlier statues of kneeling and crouching figures (Frankfort 1939: 22). Regarding this figure, the debate

¹⁴ For the Imdugud, see Jacobsen 1976: 7, 128–29; Black and Green 1992: 107–108; Wiggermann 1993: 243.

¹⁵ Jacobsen 1989 provides relevant bibliography for this debate.



Figure 4: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard, statues of standing male and female figures holding cups. Baghdad, Iraq Museum IM 19752, IM 19751. Frankfort 1935a: frontispiece. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

has centered on whether the individual represented is human or divine. But it may be that the figure is neither.¹⁶ Semi-divine, mythological beings, such as belted heroes, stand outside the binary division of human and divine.

That the image on the base of the statue nevertheless is closely related to the male figure itself is suggested by the fact that the heads of both have been mutilated. The nose of the male figure had been broken off before the burial of the hoard; the head of the bird is missing altogether. Although mutilation of the nose, specifically, has been associated with royal sculpture, the numerous examples of temple sculpture in general that are missing the nose indicate that these practices should not be associated exclusively with the royal realm.¹⁷ It is further unlikely that the largest male figure in the Asmar hoard is a royal representation. While the heroic quality of the belted hero has been associated with kingship, royal iconography does not literally draw on the belted hero (Asher-Greve 1997: 443–44; Costello 2010: 33). Rather than a nude belted individual with the hair worn loose, what we accept as the Late Uruk

¹⁶ See also Selz (1997: 181), who suggested that the statues embodied both god and worshiper.

¹⁷ For the mutilation of royal statues, see Brandes 1980; Bahrani 2003: 149–84; Feldman 2009: 45–46; Woods 2012. For examples of statues in the Diyala region that are missing the nose, see Frankfort 1939, 1943. According to Frankfort (1939: 38), nos. 23, 54, and 169 either had been prepared to receive or had received a “new nose.”



Figure 5: Ur, Seal Impression Strata, drawing of the design from an Early Dynastic cylinder seal impressed on sealings. After Legrain 1936: pl. 20, no. 387 (U.14790, U.15019, U.18404).

royal image bears clear signifiers of royal status comprised of a garment referred to in scholarship as the net skirt and a headdress with a rolled or bulging brim. These attributes may continue into the Early Dynastic period, although the identification of the royal image initially is difficult to discern. By the end of the Early Dynastic period, royal iconography includes the hair bound into a chignon and a tufted garment that leaves one shoulder free.

Accepting nevertheless that the image on the base of the statue is closely related to the male figure, it is worth noting that Early Dynastic seal impressions from the Seal Impression Strata (SIS) at Ur also depict a bird with outstretched wings grasping quadrupeds (Fig. 5). In the SIS examples, which are roughly contemporary with the Asmar hoard, the composition of the bird grasping quadrupeds is placed over an architectural structure. The architectural structure in the cylinder seal reconstructed here is framed by the symbols of the goddess Inanna, thus orienting the composition at a sacred entrance.¹⁸ The identification of the bird as the Imdugud is an open question here, too, since the crucial identifying feature of a lion head is absent. Regardless of the precise subject being depicted, the association of the bird grasping animals with entrances to temples nevertheless is significant given the association of the burial of the Asmar hoard with the entrance to the Abu Temple. Perhaps the image on the base of the statue is meant to indicate possession rather than identity. The Imdugud bird on the drinking vessel of the god Ningirsu, for example, signifies that the vessel is the possession of Ningirsu (Sarzec 1884–1912: plate 43bis). Similarly, the Imdugud bird on the base of the Asmar hoard statue could signify that the statue is the possession of the resident deity of the Abu Temple. The parallel mutilation of the nose of the standing figure and of the head of the bird on the base then could be interpreted in relation to the

¹⁸ See also the reconstruction of the Temple of Ninhursag at Tell al-'Ubaid, in which the Early Dynastic copper-alloy Imdugud relief is reconstructed over the entrance (Hall and Woolley 1927: 116 and plate 38).

temple. The mutilation of the largest male figure, which holds a cup, then is a symbolic removal of an image associated with the performative representation of the cultic activities discussed above. Perhaps the mutilation of this image occurred at a time when representation was shifting to the human donor as a frontal human figure with clasped hands.

As noted above, the largest male figure in the Asmar hoard bears affinities with the sculpture of belted heroes that preceded it. These affinities create a type of hybrid iconography, which perhaps argues against a single fixed identity for the statues in the Asmar hoard. We therefore might look to a sort of collective identity for the correct identification. That is, the statues in the Asmar hoard might not have a link to any one single donor because they stand at the beginning, before the codification of the temple statue tradition. Following this line of reasoning, they demonstrate a temple sculpture tradition just emerging and in the process of becoming a consistent representational mode. In the guise of the cultic performance of libation, they do not assume any one identity, and they are not the product of any one donor.

Statues that are aligned with a temple and its deity rather than with a specific donor could challenge ideas about the immutability of the donor image. The large quantity of temple sculpture surviving from the Early Dynastic period, moreover, should not be equated with the autonomous motivations of the donor. Rather, the dedication of Early Dynastic sculpture cannot be separated from our understanding of the temple institution as an operative force behind the authority of the Early Dynastic city-state. Correspondingly, one plausible theory is that the donor had to do something for – or offer something to – the temple to be able to dedicate a statue to the resident deity.

Hansen (2003: 29–30) suggested that a small number of statues on which land transactions are inscribed may have been dedicated to temples on the occasion of the transactions they record. Among royal sculpture, there is also a correlation between the completion of a temple building project and the dedication of a statue to the resident deity of that temple.¹⁹ And by the end of the third millennium BCE, the dedication of royal statues was regularly connected to donations of continuous offerings for those statues (Zettler and Sallaberger 2011: 14; see also Winter 1992: 29–30). We therefore might infer further that the land transactions inscribed on a small number of Early Dynastic statues were in some manner connected to the maintenance of those statues. Gelb described this as a *quid pro quo* arrangement, in which the continued benevolence of the deity was in proportion to the continued maintenance of the statue. Behind the façade of dedication, the temple benefitted through the income gained in offerings and land donations (Gelb 1987: 138). In all likelihood, the temple therefore controlled the access to, and production of, an image that was probably manufactured in the temple; certainly dedicated to the temple; and always disposed of exclusively within the temple.

¹⁹ For examples, see the Early Dynastic statue of Enmetena of Lagash (Steible 1982: Ent. 1; Cooper 1986: La 5.17); see also the statues of Gudea of Lagash (RIME 3/1).



Figure 6: Tell Asmar, Abu Temple, Early Dynastic sculpture hoard, statue of a standing male figure with head and body carved separately. Baghdad, Iraq Museum IM 19759. Frankfort 1939: no. 11 (As. 33:439). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

If we therefore accept that the donor did not necessarily have autonomy over his or her own statue, then we have to consider that the life of an Early Dynastic temple statue – as a physical object – could also extend beyond a one-to-one correspondence with a single donor. Many Early Dynastic statues are constructed by joining various body parts – most commonly, the head, torso, and feet. The frequent presence of drilled holes and the frequent use of bitumen as an adhesive on Early Dynastic temple statues suggest a distinct pattern that cannot be satisfied by the usual explanations of accidental breakage and subsequent repair. An alternative to interpreting drilled holes and bitumen as evidence of ancient repair is that these statues represent composite sculpture assembled from various pieces of stone. The head, including the hair and beard, of the smallest standing male figure in the Asmar hoard, for example, was carved from a different piece of stone than that of the body and was attached by means of a drilled hole (Fig. 6).²⁰

²⁰ Frankfort 1939: 24. The feet are missing but likewise would have been secured by pegs inserted into drilled holes on the underside of the skirt.

As would be expected, many more sculpture fragments than complete statues are retrieved in excavation. In some instances, however, these fragments form a consistent pattern in the archaeological record. Concentrations of sculpted heads in fact are often left behind in the occupation levels of temples. This might suggest that the addition of a new head was sufficient for creating a new statue for a new donor.

Was composite construction, by which temple statues were assembled from component parts, practiced in order to facilitate the use, disassembly, and then reuse of temple sculpture? We accept similar practices for metal statues. The Ur III administrative archive, for example, attests to the practice in the Innana Temple at Nippur of recycling temple objects made of metal, which could be melted down for re-use; in one instance these objects were melted down for placement on the cult statue of Inanna (Zettler 1992: 146; Zettler and Sallaberger 2011: 23). The Palace G texts at Ebla document the annual receipt of silver for the head of Kura, the city god, likely for the ritual renewal of the cult statue (Archi 2005: 81).

How did assembling and disassembling affect the sense of the *alan* as an essential presence of the donor in the statue? Cult statues, for example, were an impermanent abode of the divine. When a cult statue was damaged, the divine presence could be withdrawn (Walker and Dick 1999). Late third millennium texts refer to provisions for performing the mouth-opening ritual annually on the statues of Gudea (Sallaberger 1993: 281 and *tabelle* 101). These references would suggest that this ritual was not performed just once when the statue was initially consecrated. Rather, the ritual was repeated at intervals. The renewal of the statue potentially was an iterative practice in which an aspect of the represented entered the statue repeatedly. Perhaps a reuse of the temple statue for multiple donors similarly could be obtained.

The desire for a stable, recognizable form that resembled an *alan* more than it resembled any given human donor was one important reason for abstraction in Early Dynastic temple statues. In addition to potentially mediating social interactions through time and space and among the realms of living, deceased, and divine, the consistent use of abstraction in the Early Dynastic sculpture corpus potentially had a practical aspect in facilitating the steady supply of statues to the donor sphere. While this hypothesis can be problematized vis-à-vis the ideological aspect of the *alan*, the reality is that we already accept such practices as they occur among cult statues as well as other temple statues in metal and metal objects in general. Rather than a singular definitive death of a statue, a plausible alternative is that Early Dynastic temple statues were continually remade, thus prolonging the life of the statue beyond the representation claimed by any one single donor.

Conclusion

An examination of the circumstances under which the Asmar sculpture hoard appeared is informative regarding temple practices in the Diyala region. As the earliest

stratified corpus of temple sculpture, the Asmar hoard belongs to a specific time and place. The dedication of statues to temples nevertheless is a widespread practice. It therefore is possible to take a similar approach in the examination of other contexts in which temple statues first appear. Such an examination suggests that temple statues evolved from a need to depict the donor in human form. This need was stimulated by a shift in cultic practices, discernible in the equipment, installations, and architectural layout of the Abu Temple. How and why exactly this shift was effected likely varied from temple to temple.

In leaving aside the Early Dynastic statue as an aesthetic object intended solely for viewing, the ritual life of temple sculpture can be examined. The status of Early Dynastic temple sculpture was likely inherent in the very existence of the statue itself, in the privilege of access to dedication. As a possession of the temple, statues formed a distinct artifactual category within the visual culture of dedication. Abstraction therefore was a response to the need for a statue to have a consistent and recognizable visual form: identifiable by appearance, the alān resembled a distinct category of temple object more than it resembled any given human donor. By achieving a degree of consistency, abstraction was a structuring element for the encounter with the temple statue. The extended life of the statue beyond any one single donor is another significant reason for the persistence of abstraction in temple sculpture. Abstraction therefore was appropriate for statues dedicated to temples. When representation shifted in favor of the donor image, abstraction thus became the principal quality of temple sculpture.

When the Asmar hoard was first excavated, emphasis was placed on the relatively well preserved condition of the sculpture and its stylistic unity. Yet in terms of iconography there are many anomalies within the hoard itself. They include the bases of both the largest male and female figures, the presence of standing figures holding cups, and the kneeling belted hero. The temple sculpture tradition of a frontal figure with clasped hands is also present among the hoard, but the human figure is just emerging, and these iconographies have not yet become separate and distinct. In reality, the Asmar hoard therefore is an eclectic ensemble of sculpture.

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VI. Making and Defining Space

Alice A. Petty

A Feast for the Eyes: Depiction and Performance of Ritual within the Sacred Space of Middle Bronze Age Ebla

Abstract: This study explores a corpus of three carved, stone artifacts from Middle Bronze Age (2000–1600 BCE) Ebla. Each features discrete vignettes set into registers, incorporating related motifs such as banqueting and musical performances, interspersed with images of fantastic creatures, sacrifice, ritual lion slayings, and processions of animals and attendants. The characters and their activities are similar, as is the manner of their conveyance (that is, the narrative). Through an analysis of their visual program, this article explores the relationship between the narrative depiction of ritual and the practice of viewing – or reading – as ritual performance. Each artifact is presented first individually, focusing on issues of scale, material, and form. The imagery depicted on the object is described and analyzed. The corpus is then addressed in its entirety, examining elements such as point of view, relationships among characters and with the viewer, and levels and types of discourse used. This interpretive approach, coupled with the role of the viewer, suggests that participation in the cult and the performance of ritual – specifically acts of offering and consumption – are promoted as a means by which the informed viewer may access divine power. That this message is conveyed to the viewer as (s)he moves through the sacred space of the temple is critical to its reading, as the temple is the architectural, or spatial, manifestation of the cult, just as ritual is the performative manifestation.

Keywords: banquet, basin, Ebla, music, performance, ritual, Stele of Ishtar

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Introduction

This study explores a select group of stone objects – a stele and two basins – bearing ritual and mythological scenes carved in relief. Due to their significant size, weight, and form, these artifacts qualify as architectural features as much as *objets d’art*. Through an analysis of their visual program, this study explores the relationship between the narrative depiction of ritual and the practice of viewing – or reading – as ritual performance.

Each of these artifacts dates to the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1600 BCE) and was recovered from the site of Ebla, modern day Tell Mardikh, located approximately

60 km south of Aleppo, Syria. While the relationships between these artifacts in terms of findspot, audience, or function are unclear, the relationship between their respective visual programs is apparent. Each one features a number of discrete vignettes set into registers. The vignettes incorporate related motifs such as banqueting and musical performances, interspersed with images of fantastic creatures, ritual lion slayings, and processions of animals and attendants. The characters and their activities are similar, as is the manner of their conveyance (that is, the narrative).

First, this study will present each artifact individually. This discussion considers issues of scale, material, and form, and the imagery depicted on the object is described and analyzed. The corpus is then addressed in its entirety by exploring the relationship between the individual components (characters, motifs, and activities) and the narrative or style. The analysis also examines elements such as point of view, relationships among characters and with the viewer, and levels and types of discourse used.

A final section argues that these artifacts are architectural features. As such, they can best be understood as components of a visual and architectural program that composes the sacred space. The depicted imagery refers to ritual banquets performed in the sacred precincts of Middle Bronze Age Ebla, and the mythological and esoteric signifiers are part of a narrative constellation that requires the physical and conceptual participation of a viewer. This participation was part of the ritualized practice of approaching and occupying sacred space that – like the banquets themselves – required access, understanding of the symbolism and its significance, and both prescribed and proscribed movement.

Middle Bronze Age Ebla: An Overview

Enclosed within a monumental fortification wall during the Middle Bronze Age, the city of Ebla was divided into an acropolis and a lower town.¹ At the northwestern foot of the acropolis is a sacred area measuring approximately 150 m by 100 m, which the excavators refer to as “the square of the cisterns.” It is bound on the north by a temenos wall, on the west and south by roads, and on the east by the retaining wall of the acropolis. Enclosed in this area are Temple P2, an *in antis* temple, and Monument P3, a high terrace of limestone blocks. Both of these features are associated with the goddess Ishtar. The precinct is distinguished by a large cistern surrounded by votive pits, or *favissae*. Food and votive offerings were recovered from the rock cut cisterns, and while the *favissae* were used for discarding temple fittings, their primary function

¹ This general description of the city plan for Middle Bronze Age Ebla highlights those locations that are pertinent to the discussion of this particular corpus. For a more thorough and comprehensive description of the city plan for Old Syrian Ebla, see Pinnock 2001.

seems to have been the deposition of votive offerings. Marchetti and Nigro (2001: 280–81) argue that these *favissae* were probably the foci of ritual practices associated with the cult of Ishtar. According to these authors, the volume and homogeneity of the material seems to attest to a communal rite involving food consumption and symbolic votive gifts for the goddess. They suggest that this ritual was parallel, although distinct from, the royal ritual banquets that are depicted on the basins and stele, discussed below.

The precinct also contains dog burials. In one, two hounds appear to have had their necks snapped. Nigro (1998: 24) suggests this indicates that these bloodless sacrifices were not ritually consumed. Also noteworthy is the ritual burial of a human cranium and a sheep cranium in conjunction with two leg bones from a sheep. Excavation of the *favissae* that were dedicated to the ritual deposition of cult material revealed complete ceramic vessels, beads, silver and bronze snakes, and clay figurines (Pinnock 2001: 17; Marchetti and Nigro 1997: 5–7).

The Western Palace is located in the lower town as well. Lying to the west of the sacred precinct, this palace was the residence of the crown prince. Also in this area are Sanctuary B2 and the temple of Reshef, both built over the Royal Necropolis adjacent to an area of private homes (Pinnock 2001: 17). It is argued² that one of the basins, discussed below, is from the Reshef temple despite having been recovered from the village of Mardikh, based on the recovery of several basin fragments from an archaeologically secure context within the temple.

Another stone basin of yellowish limestone, discussed below, was recovered from a corner of the cella of Temple D, located on the western edge of the acropolis. This temple, with an associated sacred area, is believed to have been dedicated to Ishtar. This associated sacred area seems to have been disturbed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1600 BCE). Other indicators point to a later Iron Age disturbance as well, and it appears that a number of trash pits were dug in this area of the acropolis during that period. Due to this disturbance, temple furnishings and artifacts were found out of context. Among these is the so-called Stele of Ishtar, the base of which was recovered *in situ* in the vestibule of Sanctuary G3, while multiple carved relief fragments were recovered from rubbish pits throughout the acropolis (Matthiae 1987: 451–52; 1995: 390–91).

The Ishtar Stele

The base of the Ishtar Stele was found *in situ* in Sanctuary G3, located in the area in front of the façade of Temple D. The stele is made of blue-grey basalt and is 150 cm tall, 42 cm wide, and 22 cm thick. The top of the monument is broken off, which

² Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 422.

Pinnock (2006: 91; see also Matthiae 1987: 462) suggests may have been due to the fact that the uppermost registers featured depictions of the king. Images of fantastic, mythological creatures on sides A, B, and C are interspersed with selected vignettes, which can best be interpreted as depictions of a ritual banquet.³

The visual program of the stele can be seen in the accompanying line drawing (Fig. 1). The registers are identified by side (A, B, C, D) and are numbered from top to bottom, with registers A1, B1, C1 and D1 referring to those uppermost registers that have been lost. Unlike sides B through D, which each have three full registers preserved, side A (Fig. 2) appears to have four.

While register A1 is broken off, one can see the remains of a foot, suggesting a figure standing in profile and facing inward. The uppermost preserved register on side A (register A2) features a shrine sheltering a cult statue of Ishtar, situated on the back of a bull. Clothed in a tufted garb, Ishtar's cult statue stands on a platform within a winged shrine. Both the figure of the cult statue and the bull upon which it rides are in profile, facing the viewer's left side. Flanking the statue on either side of the bull are frontally facing bull-men wearing horned crowns. The bull-man on the viewer's left holds a tall spear; the bull-man on the viewer's right holds a small, unidentifiable object.

In the second preserved register from the top (A3a), the central image is a tall and narrow table, marked with a series of horizontal lines and stacked with bread. Facing the table on either side stand two beardless figures, four in total. Each of these figures holds a small, crescent-shaped clapper in each hand. One arm is bent and held aloft, while the other rests at the figure's side. Clappers are regularly featured in comparable scenes, and are seen in three-dimensional sculpture as well.⁴ According to Cheng (2009: 172–73), percussive clappers were crafted from sheets of a copper alloy and would have been struck against each other like cymbals.⁵

3 Pinnock (1994: 15) defines the banquet theme as a figurative motif in which one or more individuals are represented sitting, sometimes in the presence of loaded tables or in front of large jars, drinking from or holding a small cup in one hand. Servants may be present. When more than one person is represented, they may be either facing each other or turned in the same direction. These scenes sometimes depict an exclusively male or female gathering, but may also show a mixed crowd.

4 Compare in particular to TM.88.P.627, a blue-grey basalt sculpture of a seated priest measuring 108 × 42 cm, recovered from Area P. The beardless figure is depicted wearing a long robe with fringed trim. He holds a clapper in one hand and a cup in the other (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: catalog no. 254).

5 Woolley (1934: 126–27; see also Cheng 2009: 172) recovered a pair of clappers – as well as the nails that would have affixed their wooden handles – in Grave 1332 at Ur. He identified them based on similar finds recovered from Kish.

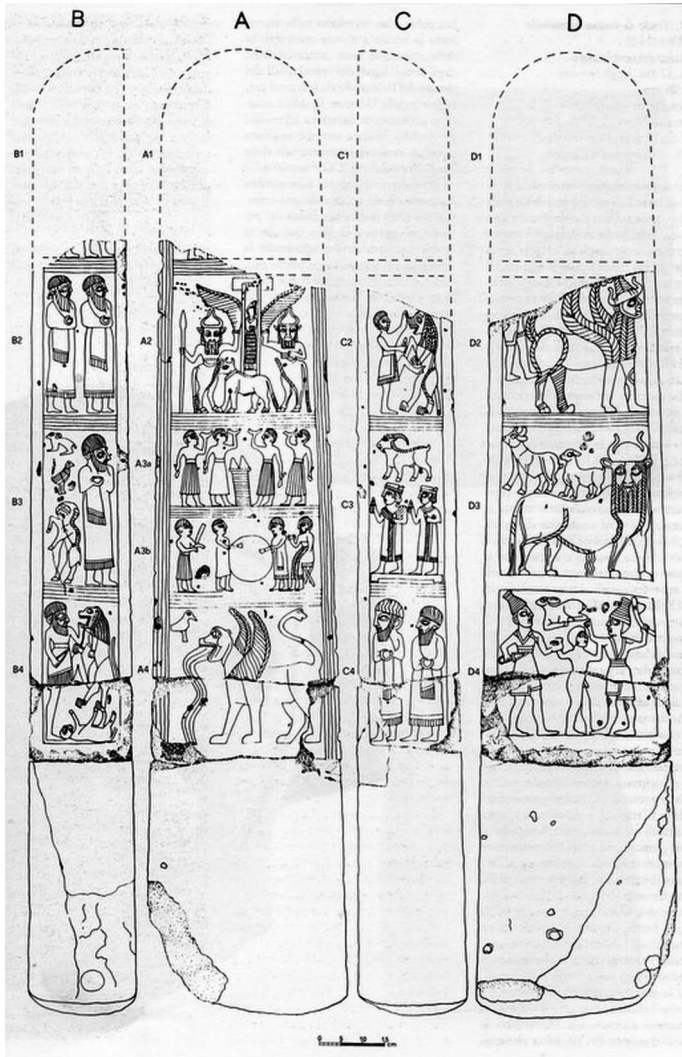


Figure 1: Line drawing of the Stele of Ishtar. The Idlib Museum, Syria.
 Courtesy of the Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria.

The scene depicted in register A3b is closely related to that shown above in register A3a. It is unclear why they are separated into distinct components. Both are scenes of musical performances, and the top of A3a and the bottom of A3b line up with the upper and lower boundary of the middle registers on each of the other three sides of the monument. At the center of the scene in register A3b stands a circular drum, which is nearly the height of a man. On either side stands a drummer in profile, facing inward and beating the drum with a round-ended drumstick. Behind the drummer on

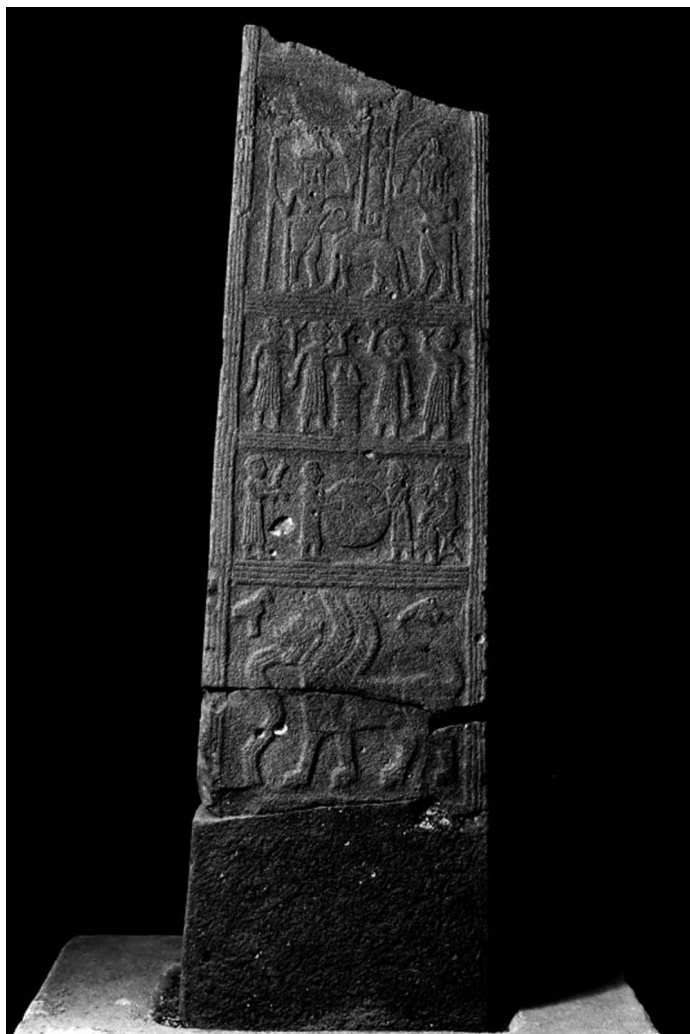


Figure 2: The Stele of Ishtar, side A, basalt. The Idlib Museum, Syria.
 Courtesy of the Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria.

the viewer's right side sits a bearded figure – possibly a king – holding a cup. Behind the drummer to the viewer's left stands a beardless figure in a simple skirt holding a small, crescent-shaped clapper and a long, narrow object, possibly an instrument.

The bottom register (A4) features a winged, serpent-tailed, leonine chimera standing in profile. A torrent of liquid flows from its mouth. Facing the chimera, in the field above its head, is a small bird.

Like A1, a small portion of the bottom of register B1 is preserved below the break, revealing three feet that suggest at least two standing figures in profile. Register B2

features two bearded, cup-holding figures, who stand facing the viewer's right toward side A. They are mirror images of two standing, bearded, cup-holding figures facing the viewer's left that appear in register C4. Marchetti and Nigro (2001: 254) note that these cups strongly resemble the so-called collared bowls characterized by a carinated body and grooved, vertical neck, some sixty of which were recovered from the lowest levels of *favissa* 5238.

This mirroring of images evidenced by register B2 and C4 also occurs in register B4 at the bottom of the stele and in register C2. The former shows a bearded, knife-wielding hero fighting a lion, a horned caprid trampled beneath the lion's paws. This scene, lacking a horned caprid, is mirrored in register C2. These two scenes frame what appears to be the central image of the stele's entire visual program: the ritual musical performance in registers A3a and A3b. On side B, adjacent to the performance vignette is a single, standing figure facing inward toward the performance on side A. Behind him are a rabbit, a bird – possibly a dove – and a rampant caprid. On the other side, in register C3, two standing, striding female figures carrying knives walk below a horned caprid, presumably their sacrificial offering. The presence of the bird and the caprids are noteworthy, as Marchetti and Nigro point out (2001: 280), in light of the dove and caprid bones – ostensibly food refuse – that were recovered from the *favissae*.

The primary motifs of the stele seem to be the offering table and the drum from registers A3a and A3b. The figures in registers A3, B3, and C3 all face inward toward these images, and the mirrored scenes from registers B2 and C4 and registers C2 and B4 cross at this juncture. Moreover, the interaction between the figures on sides A, B, and C indicates that side A can be understood as the front of the stele. The significance of this primacy of the emblems of the food and music that is being offered and consumed will be discussed below.

Side D of the stele represents the back side to A. Viewers looking at side A may be able to see some or all of sides B and/or C by leaning or directing their gaze, but the images on sides A and D cannot be seen simultaneously. Perhaps for this reason, the three registers on side D do not appear to function in obvious conversation with the rest of the visual program. Register D2 features a winged creature with a human face, as well as the legs and short robe of an accompanying figure largely preserved in the field above and behind. Below, in register D3, is another bull-man facing the viewer, but with his body in profile⁶. In the field above him are a bull and a cow.

The central figure of the scene depicted in register D4 is a naked male prisoner on the verge of sacrifice or slaughter. He is beardless and without clothing or other adornment. He is framed by two figures facing toward him; these figures wear skirts and belts, along with a band or possibly a collar at the neck and a tall headdress. The figure to the viewer's left holds the prisoner by the lower arm with his left hand, and

⁶ According to Danrey (2004: 135–36), these are among the very earliest depictions of winged bulls, a motif that becomes monumental – in terms of both prevalence and scale – in Iron Age Assyria.

in his right he holds a knife. The figure to the right holds the prisoner by the hair, while his other hand holds what Nigro (1998: 30) identifies as a fenestrated axe.⁷ Nigro suggests that these weapon-wielding characters may be interpreted as royal figures. He argues that their short garment appears under the classic bordered cloak of Old Syrian kings, which has been convincingly identified with the Old Syrian royal battle uniform (Pinnock 1996: 178). Furthermore, their headdress may be similar to the oval crown of the Eblaite kings, which is known from a later ivory inlay retrieved in the Northern Palace (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 397). Finally, Nigro points out that the duplication of the royal figure is otherwise attested in Old Syrian glyptic art.⁸ The field above and behind the head of the nude prisoner or victim features a small crouching caprid. In his examination of this scene, Nigro (1998: 30) – working directly from the stele itself – asserts that he has been able to discern a crescent shaped pendant attached to the neck of this animal. He argues that this pendant is comparable to those seen on the sacrificial bulls from the wall paintings of the Royal Palace of Mari.⁹ Because the context of the stele does not suggest warfare, this raises the discomfiting possibility that the nude figure is a sacrifice. Marchetti and Nigro (1997: 32; see also Nigro 1998: 34) suggest that there may be a practical connection between this vignette and the aforementioned burial discovered in the square of the cisterns.¹⁰

If the volume and homogeneity of the food refuse recovered from the square of the cisterns indicates that ritual banqueting was within the range of experienced events for the Middle Bronze Age residents of Ebla, then it is probable that the banquet depicted on the stele was an occasion at least recognized, if not performed and celebrated, by those people who would have seen the stele in sanctuary G3. But what of the other images on the stele? How are viewers – both ancient and modern – to read the chimera with a torrent of water flowing from its mouth or the bull-men? These seemingly discordant vignettes are a part of the narrative constellation of the stele, connected to the composition in its entirety by the boundaries of the register.

Matthiae (1987: 474–76) convincingly argues that the figurative themes represented on the monument belong to three distinct categories of representation – the divine, the cultic or ritual, and the mythological – and that the program allows these categories to intersect with one another. The divine is represented by the images of the cult statue and the fantastic bovid and leonine creatures that refer to the goddess

⁷ For the fenestrated axe, see TM.78.Q.481 in Matthiae *et al.* (1995: 425).

⁸ Nigro (1998: 30) provides specific examples: For symmetric duplication of the royal figure, see Porada 1948: pl. CXLIV nos. 950E, 953E, 954E; Moortgat 1940: pl. 64, no. 535. Comparanda for the composition itself includes Frankfort 1939: pl. XLII:f; Hammade 1987: 88, no. 163; and Buchanan 1982: 416–417, no. 1196.

⁹ For the wall painting, see Parrot 1958: 20, fig. 18 pl Ba.

¹⁰ Burial D.6274. The burial, a mud brick and stone-lined pit, was rectangular in shape and sealed with stones; interred within was a human skull, and the badly degraded skull of a sheep, as well as two sheep leg bones.

Ishtar. The second category, the cultic or ceremonial, is represented by the images of banqueting, procession, and musical performance. The final category, the mythological, is expressed in the acts of ritual sacrifice. Matthiae suggests that the slayings of the human prisoner, on the one hand, and the fierce lions, on the other, forge a connection between the divine and the cultic. The slayings, which constitute the destruction of negative or chaotic forces of the natural and human realm, may be understood as an act of worship. Matthiae notes that these mythological scenes of the heroic slaying of the enemy (human or otherwise) do not appear on the main face of the stele and are always bordered by a divine image of the goddess and/or her representative creature. He suggests that this may indicate that the hero, possibly the king, draws his power from the goddess. It is also possible that the divine images confine the scenes of dangerous forces, much like the boundaries of the register. These scenes, distinct from those of ceremonial practices, are thus a key part of a complex visual program that – rather than documenting an historical event – refers to a constellation of meaning about ritual, divinity, and myth.

The Stone Basin from Temple D

One of a number of stone basins recovered from Ebla displaying clear correspondence to the Ishtar stele in terms of subject and narrative, the second object to be discussed is a rectangular, two-chambered basin that has been damaged by wind erosion. Made of yellowish limestone, the basin is 61 cm tall, 113 cm long, and 65 cm wide, and features carvings on three of its four sides. This basin, identified as TM.65.D.236 (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 421), was recovered from Temple D on the acropolis, a tripartite long-room construction, including a cella, an anteroom, and a vestibule, which is thought to have been dedicated to Ishtar.¹¹ The basin was discovered in a corner of the cella, positioned in such a way that one of its carved sides was facing the wall. It seems unlikely, however, that this was its original context. It is more probable that the basin stood alongside one of the longer side walls of the cella, with its fourth, uncarved side against the wall.

The long side of the basin (Fig. 3) is divided into two registers. The central motif in the upper register is a bull-legged offering table, piled high with bread. To the right of the bull-legged table sits a female figure (a priestess or queen) with long, flowing hair who holds a vessel in her right hand. She is facing a male figure – almost certainly the king – who sits across from her on the other side of the table. Standing behind the seated king are three figures armed with spears. Behind the priestess or

¹¹ The attribution of the temple to Ishtar is based in large part on the recovery of the Ishtar Stele from within Sanctuary G3, one of a set of small, associated structures located just to the south of the temple. See Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 421.



Figure 3: Stone basin from Temple D, front, limestone. The National Museum of Aleppo, Syria. Courtesy of Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

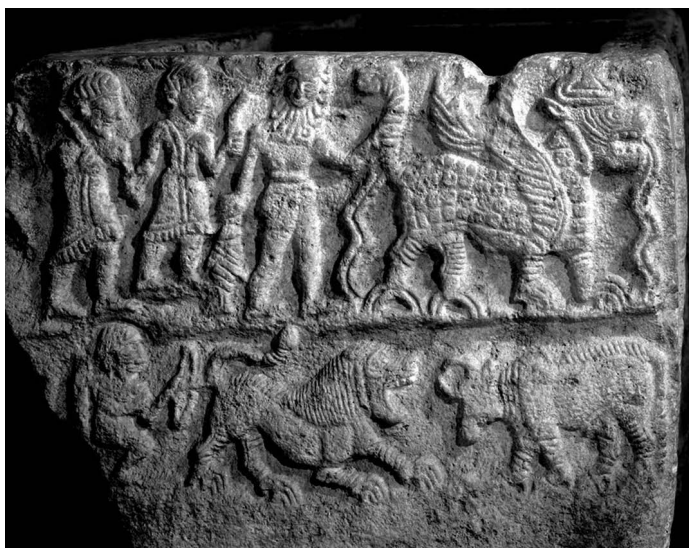


Figure 4: Stone basin from Temple D, side, limestone. The National Museum of Aleppo, Syria. Courtesy of Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

queen stand two robed attendants carrying three, handled-vessels between them. The orientation of the figures indicates that, as on the Ishtar Stele, the central motif of the visual program is the offering table. In the lower register, a procession of horned caprids, all facing toward the viewer's right, is attacked by a lion next to what appears to be an altar ornamented with a stylized bird.



Figure 5: Carved wooden artifact. The Idlib Museum, Syria. Courtesy of the Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria.

On the first of the short sides of the basin, a heroic figure stands grabbing the hind legs of two lions. The second short side (Fig. 4) is divided into two registers. In the upper register, a naked, bearded figure – a hero, who appears to be wearing a horned crown – holds a fish in one hand and a winged chimera’s tail in the other. The winged chimera wears a horned crown. Beside the hero, a torrent of liquid flows from the mouth of a chimera, very much like register A4 of the Ishtar Stele. In the bottom register, there is a lion-hunting scene before a bull.

That the bull-legged offering table is a pivotal motif of the visual program of the piece is evident from its location in the center of the composition of the long side of the basin. Moreover, the attention and gaze of each of the figures are directed toward it. This bull-legged offering table is a well-attested motif in Old Syrian art. It is evidenced in a scene carved into a wooden artifact (Fig. 5) recovered from Ebla’s so-called “Tomb of the Lord of the Goats.” There, it also appears in a ritual banquet scene with familiar elements, such as the attendants carrying handled vessels and the bull-man (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 505). Pinnock (1994: 22) suggests that this variation of the banquet motif, in which a solitary figure is seated holding a cup before a loaded table, is of a funerary nature and refers to a feast for dead kings or ancestors, a feast associated with the beginning of the lunar cycle. The bull-legged table also appears as a motif on cylinder seals and stelae.¹²

¹² For seal impressions from Karum Kanesh in the so-called Colonial Syrian Style, featuring the motif of the bull-legged offering table, see Özgüç 1953: 235–37; Buchanan 1981: 398–99; Teissier 1984: 216–17; and Porada 1948: 111. For Anatolian style seals, see Özgüç 1965: 75–76, 79–80, and 82–85. For Old Syrian examples, see Speleers 1917: 167–68; Hammade 1987: 115–16; Teissier 1984: 136–37; and



Figure 6: Bull-legged offering table, basalt. The Idlib Museum, Syria.
Courtesy of the Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria.

An actual example (Fig. 6) is known from a fragment of a basalt, bull-legged offering table identified as TM.91.P.717 (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 504; see also 1994: 173–77). It was recovered from Ebla’s square of the cisterns, just outside Monument P3.¹³ It stands 38 cm tall and is 64 cm across at the base. The tabletop, now lost, was supported by a central column that was anchored into the three bull legs forming its base. This central column features a motif of nested crescents.¹⁴ Above each of the hooves that make up the feet of the table is a break, probably indicating the point from which additional supports extended from each foot to the tabletop.

Buchanan 1981: 426–27. See Matthiae 1994 for a more thorough inventory and discussion of the glyptic comparanda.

For a stele from Hama, see Ingolt 1940: 79–80 and Riis *et al.* 1990: 56–58. From Tell Furayjah, see Lassus 1936: 53–55. On both steles, the table is part of a ritual banquet scene. The Hama stele has been dated from the 10th to 11th centuries BCE, but Pinnock (1989) convincingly argues that it should be ascribed to an archaic phase of the mature Old Syrian period (Middle Bronze Age).

13 For a thorough description of the depositional context of the bull-legged table base, including zooarchaeological evidence for an associated communal feast, see Marchetti and Nigro 2001: 249.

14 The motif of the nested crescents is provocative in light of Pinnock’s observations regarding the connections between the banqueting scenes, the celebration at the beginning of the lunar month, and the cult of the deceased kings. For examples of funerary meals attested in texts, see Sigrist 1977: 375–92; and H. Limet 1970: 59–74.

The Stone Basin from Temple B

The second bas-relief sculpted, rectangular basin is made of blue-grey basalt. It stands 53 cm tall and 88 cm long (Fig. 7). Although this artifact was found in the mid-1950s in the lower town of Tell Mardikh, it is attributed to the MB II Temple B – also referred to as the Reshef Temple – because two small, fragmentary pieces of the basin were recovered from the temple's entry steps (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 422; Pinnock 2001: 25).

On the long side of the basin, the imagery is divided into two distinct registers (Fig. 8). The lower register depicts four ferocious lions, teeth-bared, whose heads protrude out from the basin surface toward the viewer like protomes. In the upper register, a bearded king sits in profile, wearing a long, tufted garment. The king also wears an ornamental band across his head. He holds a raised cup in his left hand, while his right arm is bent with its hand at his breast. He faces a bull-legged offering table piled high with bread. On the other side of the table, facing the king, stands another bearded figure wearing a tufted robe and a banded head ornament. This figure is raising a cup, seemingly in an act of libation. At the far edge of this scene – behind the second figure – is a giant bull-man; it is noteworthy that the basin is broken between these two figures. The bull man holds a tall, narrow object, which is likely the standard of Ishtar.¹⁵ He faces the viewer. His figure takes up the entire height of the basin, so he is not confined by the boundaries of the registers. Behind the seated king are three standing soldiers or hunters, depicted in profile, carrying spears and small boomerang-shaped weapons. All of the human figures on this side of the basin face the central motif, the bull-legged offering table.

The shorter end sides of the basin feature roaring lions and a procession of bearded men carrying spears and the leading figure is holding what appears to be a shield. Like the previously described basin from Temple D, one of the long sides was left uncarved.

Analysis and Synthesis

The visual program that the stele and the two basins display is composed of explicitly constructed elements. These include form, point of view, relationships among characters, relationships between character(s) and viewer, and level and type of discourse. An analysis of these structural components reveals the narrative rules – the rules of the telling – that transform these individual components into a coherent whole.

¹⁵ This standard is attested on cylinder seal object number TM.92.P.800 (Matthiae *et al.* 1995: 417).



Figure 7: Stone basin Temple B, front and side, basalt. The National Museum of Syria, Damascus. Courtesy of Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 8: Stone basin from Temple B, front, basalt. The National Museum of Syria, Damascus. Courtesy of the Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria.

Form, Point of View

Due to their scale and material, these artifacts can be understood to be architectural features. While they may be moved with effort or assistance, the qualities of being portable or easily manipulated are not intrinsic to the form or function of either the

stele or the bi-chambered stone basins. Each of these artifacts was, throughout most of its active use-life, fixed within the sacred space of a temple. This spatial context provided those who approached it with the conceptual framework within which the object and its pictorial scheme were to be viewed and understood.

When approaching a small, visually complex object such as a cylinder seal or a clay figurine, it is the gaze of the viewer that moves from one element to another. The way in which the gaze moves is, to some extent, determined by the scale and orientation of the elements within the composition. For example, large, highly detailed, or conspicuously omitted elements draw the eye. When a row of figures all face the same direction, it is natural to look in the direction they are going or at the object they are facing. When engaging an architectural feature, the body moves as well as the gaze. The viewer is transformed into an actor as (s)he moves through the space in order to see the different sides of the object. This movement is conditioned by architectural features that – in all likelihood – were a factor in determining the situation of each of these artifacts. Note that both basins have a long, uncarved side that almost certainly faced a wall. In the same way, if the actor is not free to move, then part of the depicted narrative becomes obscured or inaccessible. This is the case with the Stele of Ishtar, which – at the time of its destruction – appears to have been pushed against a wall, a situation that obscured side D from view. Both basins and the stele appear to have been placed along walls, tucked to the side. Each of these features, therefore, was inherently peripheral; specifically, each was situated so as the viewer approached, entered, and later exited the sacred space, different sides – and the scenes depicted on those sides – were revealed, thus incorporating a chronological dimension into the viewers experience. It is a provocative possibility that these visual programs that prominently include depictions of ritual procession may have been consciously situated so that their intended audience would engage them while walking toward, through and within a sacred context.

The immovable nature and form of each of these objects would have compelled the viewer to approach the depicted images in a predetermined way and to move around the objects in what may be described as a choreographed fashion. This motion is a kind of ritual engagement with the object within the sacred space. By virtue of executing this choreography within the requisite architectural space, the viewer becomes a performer and the viewing becomes a kind of ritual performance.

Relationships among the Characters and with the Viewer

The relationships among characters or elements are indicated by directionality of gazes. Individual figures, both human and animal, manifest their point of view by means of the direction they face, which serves to highlight the object of the character's attention or intention. For example, on the front side of the stele, the attention of the

figures in registers A3a and A3b is focused on the offering table and the drum, respectively. Moreover, this scene is highlighted by the directed gaze of the figures in registers B3 and C3. A consideration of the gaze in each of these three artifacts indicates that the central object of attention or intention is the offering table.

Similarly, when a figure directs his or her gaze outward, this suggests that the viewer is the recipient of that figure's attention. Frontally facing bull-men appear on both the stele and the basin from Temple B, and the Temple B basin also features fierce, frontally facing lions. On the basin from Temple D, the bearded hero wearing a horned crown faces outward. It is noteworthy that on the basin from Temple B, the bull-man, who faces the viewer, is not constrained by the boundaries of the register. This effect introduces a pause in the viewer's engagement with the composition. In this pause, the depicted figure interacts with the viewer. The figure acts not only as a viewed character but also as one who is viewing. The spectator thus becomes the spectacle. It is noteworthy, then, that these seeing characters are all figures that Matthiae (1987) describes as categorically divine depictions.

Level and Type of Discourse

The level and type of discourse embedded in the visual programs of these objects is definitively elite. In terms of motif and composition, the best comparanda for these pieces are cylinder seals. Additionally, there is an assemblage of contemporary statues from Ebla, displayed at the porch of the Hadad temple in the northern part of the lower city, that depict seated, cup-holding men comparable to the figures in the banqueting scenes. These monuments reveal a convention by which elite men are publicly depicted (Pinnock 1994: 23).

The depictions of ritual banqueting that appear on the Stele of Ishtar and on the basins discussed above are paralleled archaeologically. Evidence from the sacred precinct includes food refuse and offerings, specifically the bones of caprids and doves; the collared bowls; possible sacrificial remains; and the basalt bull-legged offering table (Marchetti and Nigro 2001: 280–81). This suggests that the depicted banquet was an activity that was known, and possibly even experienced, by the intended audience.

Individuals in a position to recognize or understand the banquet imagery would be those who participate in – or have direct knowledge of – rituals performed by the king. These individuals would be able to identify the bull-legged table and the collared bowls from firsthand experience, or they at least would know the scenes as they appear on the glyptic art. They would understand the fantastic creatures that depict the realm of the divine not from the mundane experience of daily life, but from a language of symbol and abstraction. This recognition or familiarity implies belonging. If a viewer feels a sense of belonging, then engaging with the object within the sacred space is a particular kind of experience. If one does not belong – that is, if the

viewer is not *cognoscenti* – then the experience is very different, possibly causing alienation or inducing fear.

Conclusion

It is generally accepted that the elite representational art of Middle Bronze Age Ebla is primarily ritual and cultic in character and avoids explicit glorification of the ruler, and it has been suggested that this may be due to Ebla's subservience to Yamkhad (Akkermans and Schwartz 2003: 302). This raises the question of the purpose this promotion of cult and ritual serves. What, exactly, is being glorified and why?

In each of the objects considered in this study, the central motif appears to be the emblems of the ritual itself: the offering table and – in the case of the Ishtar Stele – the drum. The offering table suggests the ritual act of feasting, of consuming and possibly also of offering food, as an act of worship. The performance of the king – who may serve as a manifestation, or representative, of his people – therefore mediates between the human and divine realms. Arguably, music is also offered (performed) and consumed (heard) and thus the musicians also play an important role, akin to that of a priest.¹⁶ The divine presence, indicated visually by the images of the cult statue or the fantastic creatures, is therefore engaged through the medium of ritual and this ritual is represented by its emblems: offering table and musical performance.

It is noteworthy that the figures that Matthiae identifies as the fantastic manifestations of the divine presence are the characters that face forward. They are the ones that are not only seen but that see, directing their gaze at the viewer, indicating intention and attention. In this respect, the viewer is not relegated to a passive role but is, arguably, included, in the ritual itself. Through this divinely acknowledged act of spectatorship that incorporates the movement of the viewer's body as well as his or her gaze, the viewing itself may become a means by which the viewer participates in the performance of the ritual which is depicted on the object.

The interpretive approach proposed above coupled with the role of the viewer suggests that participation in the cult and the performance of ritual – specifically acts of offering and consumption – is promoted as a means by which the informed viewer may access the divine. That this message is conveyed to the viewer as (s)he moves through the sacred space of the temple is critical to its reading, as the temple is the architectural, or spatial, manifestation of the cult just as ritual is the performative manifestation.

¹⁶ In an article concerning the interpretation of scenes depicting musical performance in Early Dynastic Sumer, Cheng (2009: 165) discusses the roles of two types of professional musicians, identified as *gala* or *nar*. The *gala* is a temple official whose responsibilities include musical performance; the *nar* is a musician who is sometimes called upon to perform at the temple. While not immediately relevant to the Middle Bronze Syrian banqueting scenes, the comparison is noteworthy.

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David Kertai

The Art of Building a Late Assyrian Royal Palace

Abstract: This article discusses the architecture of Late Assyrian royal palaces. It argues that the palaces can be understood as comprising groups of spaces that combined into different types of suites. These suites were remarkably constant in their organization throughout the Late Assyrian period. The ways in which these suites were combined in each palace differed, but followed certain constraints such as the absence of second stories and the placement of the throneroom near the entrance of the palace. The actualization of these principles is discussed in more detail for the three preserved primary royal palaces of the Late Assyrian period: the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu (Nimrud), the Royal Palace of Dur-Sharruken (Khorsabad) and the Southwest Palace in Nineveh.

Keywords: architecture, Late Assyrian period, Kalḫu (Nimrud), Dur-Sharruken (Khorsabad), Nineveh

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Introduction: The Origin of Late Assyrian Palace Architecture

Late Assyrian palaces are mostly known for the decorated reliefs that once adorned the walls of their most monumental spaces. These reliefs have been studied continually since their discovery, but often as detached two-dimensional representations. Studies on their architectural context have been less frequent.¹ Little is known of the palace architecture of the preceding Middle Assyrian period. The date of the so-called Old Palace in Assur is uncertain (Pedde and Lundström 2008: 32), but its architecture is more reminiscent of the royal palaces of Qatna, Mari and Nuzi. Tukulti-Ninurta I's (1233–1197 BCE) palace at Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta (Eickhoff 1985) represents the only other

¹ The latest comprehensive works are Heinrich's 1984 book *Die Paläste im alten Mesopotamien* and to a lesser extent Turner's 1970 article "The State Apartments of Late Assyrian Palaces." Both works have been influential in shaping our understanding of these palaces and many of their interpretations are still valid today. Important contributions addressing specific buildings or aspects have been written by Margueron (1995, 2005), Reade (2000, 2002, 2008), Russell (1991, 1998, 1999) and Turner (1970b, 1976, 1998).

Middle Assyrian royal palace from the Assyrian heartland whose architecture is known in some detail, albeit very fragmentarily. The next known palace appeared more than 300 years later, when Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) constructed the Northwest Palace² in Kalḫu (Fig. 1). Its architecture differs considerably from the two Middle Assyrian palaces and sets the standard for the palace architecture of the Late Assyrian period. From a modern perspective the architectural tradition of the Late Assyrian period, first seen in Assurnasirpal II's palace, appears as if without precedent.

Its novel quality is probably exaggerated by the archaeological hiatus. The description of Tiglath-pileser I's (1114–1076 BCE) palace in Nineveh (RIMA 2: A.O.87.10: 63–77) is already quite reminiscent of the Late Assyrian period. Door colossi were constructed (RIMA 2: A.O.87.11) which, though described differently from the later Late Assyrian door colossi, were probably similar in nature to the colossi known from the Late Assyrian period (Maul 2000, especially 23–28). Stone reliefs with pictorial decoration seem absent, but other modes of decoration existed. Reliefs of basalt and “white limestone” decorated the lower parts of important rooms in Assur (RIMA 2: A.O.87.4: 63–65) and Nineveh (RIMA 2: A.O.87.10: 62). Inscribed reliefs were found in Assur (Orlamünde 2007; Pedde and Lundström 2008: 167–69). On one inscription mentioning the palace at Nineveh, Tiglath-pileser I states that “I portrayed therein [that is, the palace] the victory and *might* which the gods Assur and Ninurta, the gods who love my priesthood, had granted me” (RIMA 2: A.O.87.10: 76–77). This could refer to wall paintings, but also to tapestries; a text from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I mentions the presence of two tapestries decorated with pomegranates (?), a goat, rosettes, cities, a “farmstead” (*dunnu*) and two images of the king (Köcher 1958: 306–307, iii.27'–38'). Thus, as Pittmann (1996: 352) argues, “[t]he clues in the archaeological and textual record suggest that the Neo-Assyrian form of both historical annals and visual narrative generated by the court of the Assyrian kings was established at least from the time of Tiglath-pileser I.”

The Multiplicity of Royal Palaces

The royal palaces of the Late Assyrian Empire can be described as a multiplicity, whose exact composition, nature and operation are still unclear. Palaces existed in all of the main Assyrian centers. The Assyrian Empire should be understood as multipolar. Cities such as Assur, Nineveh and Arbela all possessed important temples and palaces (Radner 2011; Reade 2011). Nonetheless, at any given moment, only one of these palaces appears to have functioned as the primary palace of the empire. The city in which it was located can likewise be described as the primary royal city during that time.

² Many Late Assyrian palaces are named after their location on the citadel where they were discovered. All palace names used in this article are modern, mostly deriving from the excavations of Layard.

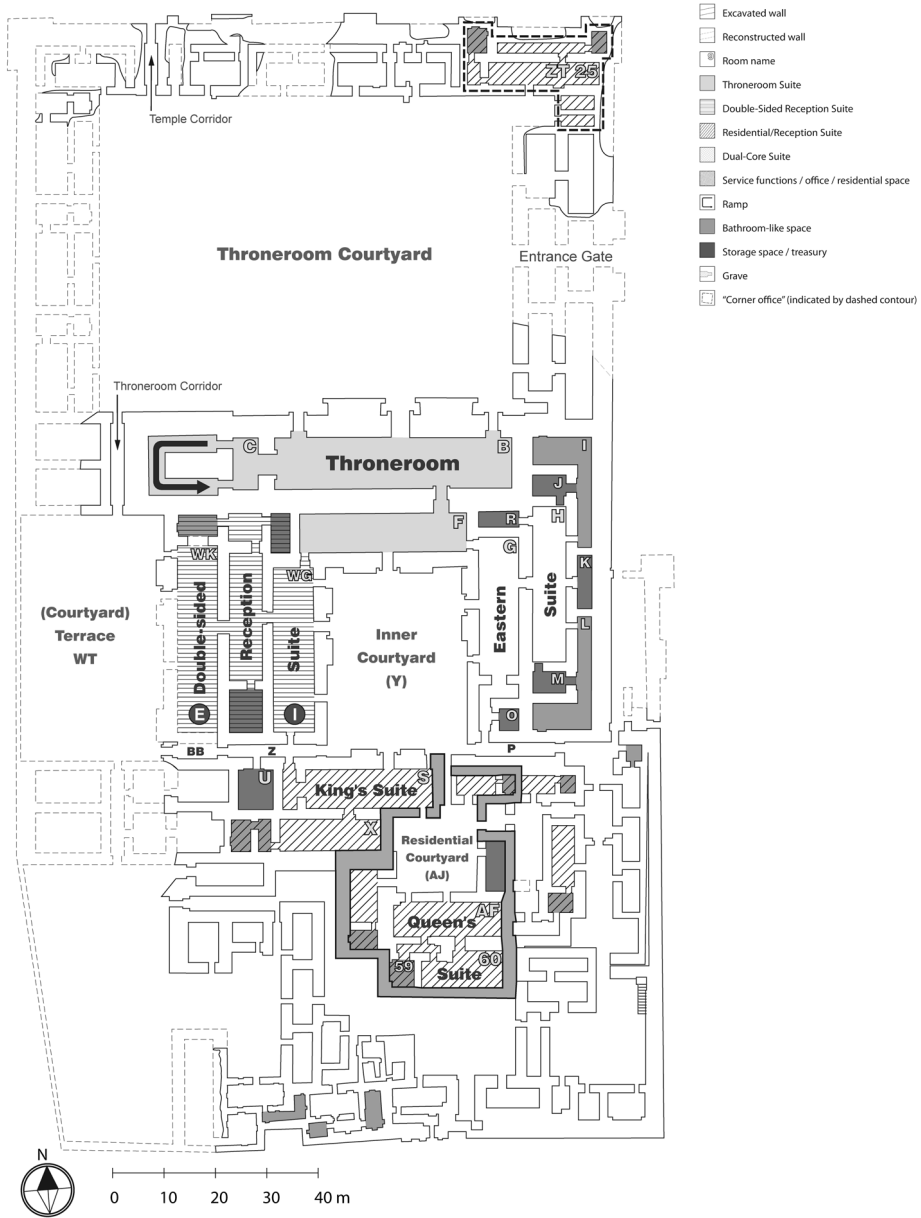


Figure 1: Floorplan of the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu. Drawn by author, based on Paley and Sobolewski 1987: plan 2; Reade 2002: fig. 2.

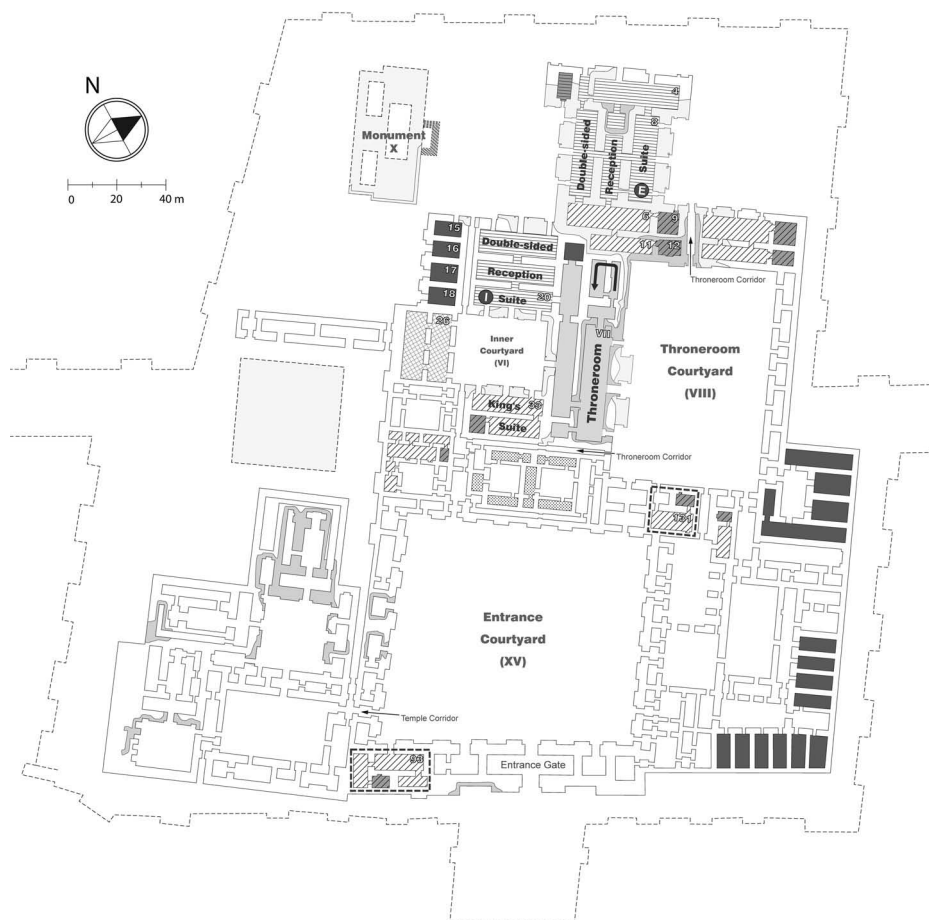


Figure 2: Floorplan of Sargon's Palace in Dur-Sharruken. Drawn by author, based on Botta 1849: pl. 6; Loud et al. 1936: fig. 22; Place 1867: pl. 3. Note that a large part of the floorplan is conjectural.

It can be argued that throughout the entire Late Assyrian period only three primary palaces existed (Kertai 2013). Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace in Kalḫu (Nimrud) was the main palace for approximately 150 years, after which Sargon's Royal Palace in Dur-Sharruken (Khorsabad) (Fig. 2) took over this status for a very short period of time. During the last century of the Assyrian Empire, Sennacherib's Southwest Palace in Nineveh (Fig. 4) functioned as the primary palace. Other royal palaces, such as Tiglath-pileser III's (744–727 BCE) so-called Central Palace and Esarhaddon's (681–669 BCE) Southwest Palace, both in Kalḫu, were never finished, whereas Assurbani-pal's North Palace in Nineveh was simply too small to have replaced the primary palace of the period (Kertai 2013).

The empire contained a second type of monumental palace, which is usually called an Arsenal or Review Palace (see Dalley and Postgate 1984: 2). Here the name Military Palace is used to stress its combined palatial and military nature. The designation Military Complex would probably be more accurate as Military Palaces were always part of larger establishments. The general Akkadian designation was *ekal māšarti*. A textual description of such a complex is known first from the reign of Sennacherib, who mentions that it was intended “for the care of the camp, the stabling of the horses and the storing of things in general” (Luckenbill 1924: 131, H4 i 56). The most famous excavated structure of this type was located in the lower town of Kalḫu and is often referred to in scholarship as Fort Shalmaneser after its founder Shalmaneser III (Mallowan 1966: 369–470).

Each new primary royal city that was established entailed the construction of a new Military Palace. Sargon’s city contained Palace F (Heinrich 1984: 170; Loud and Altman 1938: 75–78), whereas Sennacherib’s Nineveh housed this structure on and around Nebi Yunus (Scott and MacGinnis 1990: 64–67, 71–72; Turner 1970b).

Based on the royal inscriptions and the limited sizes of the palaces known from Assur, Nineveh is likely to have functioned as the primary royal city in the centuries before Assurnasirpal II established Kalḫu. The royal palaces in Nineveh constructed by Tiglath-pileser I were especially monumental (Engel 1987: 170–72; Luckenbill 1924: 128–34, H2; RIMA 2: A.O.87.10: 63–77; A.O.87.11). Nothing of a similar monumentality is known to have existed in Assur. The main Military Palace is also likely to have stood in Nineveh from at least this time onwards. Assur-resh-ishi I (1132–1115 BCE) mentioned restoring the *bīt kutalli*, or Rear Palace (RIMA 1: A.O.86.4: 4) – the name of Nineveh’s Military Palace – which suggests that it was already in existence by then.

The Spaces of a Late Assyrian Royal Palace

When discussing Late Assyrian palaces it is helpful to remind oneself of the spatial dimensions involved. The palace was filled with massive rooms and was by all accounts colossal. The throneroom, the largest room within each palace, usually measured a staggering 500 sq. m. Such space could easily have accommodated a thousand people (though getting them in and out of the room would not have been easy). Even the bathrooms reached 25 sq. m in size. In general we do not know the height of rooms, but we do have some clues to help us. The most important among these is the known minimum height of the throneroom of Residence K in Dur-Sharruken (Loud and Altman 1938: 90, pl. 88). The collapsed wall paintings found on the floor of the room were at least ten meters high, though its upper part was missing. Loud reconstructed the original height of the wall painting as 12.80 m and concluded that the room must have been at least 14 m high. Even though Residence K was palatial in nature, it can be assumed that the walls of royal palaces could reach even higher. The

main royal thronerooms are thus likely to have been at least 14 m and may well have been higher.

Second Stories

Even though the presence of second stories is sometimes assumed (see, for example, Winter 1993: 31), its archaeological basis is dubious. Three fundamental problems exclude their presence in general. First, any second story needs a means to reach it, but most Assyrian palaces lack staircases, except for the primary stairwell (actually a ramp) that was located in the Throneroom Suite. This ramp was only accessible from the throneroom, a location that seems especially inappropriate as the main means to reach upper floors. It was therefore almost certainly not intended for general use, but closely connected to the functioning of the throneroom itself. Other staircases or ramps are generally absent from the main parts of the palaces.

This requires the reconstruction of additional staircases or the acceptance that the second story was hardly accessible. Staircases are usually so inconveniently placed that Loud (Loud and Altman 1938: 27) suggested that the architects had simply realized the need for their existence too late during the building process. It is, however, unlikely that the Assyrian architects would have repeated this mistake in each palace constructed over the 250 years under discussion. Staircases or ladders of wood could theoretically have existed, but can be excluded on practical grounds. Additional monumental staircases would have concealed the stone reliefs that blanket all monumental rooms, and traces of the holes needed for the construction of wooden staircases have not been found.³ Simpler staircases would lack the monumentality typical of these palaces. It is difficult to image the king or queen having to climb ladders to reach a second story.

Second, reconstructing a second story often entails the introduction of a different architecture than the one known from the ground floor. The spatial organization of the ground floor could not have been copied on a second story, since the ground floor used courtyards as a means of communication. The problems arising from reconstructing a second story come to the fore in the work of Margueron (2005), the only scholar to propose reconstructions for second stories. His work introduces numerous ways to answer the challenges of organizing the spaces of a second story. These included columned halls, balustrades and new types of suites. Such modern-day creativity is problematic. Architecture is a socially constrained way of organizing space, making any reconstruction that requires the introduction of spatial concepts that are not substantiated by the known architecture suspect.

³ The remains of wooden staircases were found in the entrance gate of the Military Palace of Kalḫu (Oates 1962: 7–8, pl. II).

Interpreting room fills forms a related problem. The presence of fragments of the same object in different rooms has been taken to indicate the original existence of a second story, in whose rooms such objects would once have been intact. This argument must be considered a fallacy. It usually requires the assumption that the walls of a second story differed from those on the ground floor, which is impossible on constructive grounds. It is highly implausible for an object to end up in two rooms by falling down. It would require one part of an object to have fallen through the walls separating the ground floor rooms. In almost all cases the scattering of objects should be blamed on looting, destruction and post-Assyrian use.⁴

The third fundamental problem associated with a second story is how light and air would have gotten into the spaces of the ground floor. Late Assyrian palaces, and most Mesopotamian buildings, were relatively closed to the outside. A second story would have taken away the means to get light into rooms, especially the internal ones, and would have complicated their ventilation.

The absence of second stories is certainly not the result of a lack of technical know-how, but must be considered a conscious decision. In general it can be assumed that any beam capable of bridging the large width of the rooms found in these palaces would have been strong enough to accommodate a second story. The width of the walls was not related to the potential presence of a second story, as assumed by Mallowan (1966: 168–69, 378), but seems correlated to the height of the respective rooms, as was already argued by Loud (Loud and Altman 1938: 19–20). The width of the walls appears to have been intended to counter the instability associated with their height.

The height of the main ground floor rooms, which must often have reached 10 meters, and the accompanying number of stairs would certainly have diminished the enthusiasm for second stories. The available space on the ground floor appears to have sufficed to accommodate all relevant functions without the need to extend the palace vertically.

A New Typology for Late Assyrian Palatial Suites

Following Loud's work (Loud and Altman 1938: 10–13), most scholars have interpreted Late Assyrian palaces as consisting of different suites. This remains one of the most fundamental aspects of Late Assyrian palaces. The best-known typology is presented by Turner (1970a). Later typologies, such as those of Margueron (2005) and

⁴ In the case of the reliefs labeled S' and V' that fell into Rooms S, T and V of Nineveh's North Palace, these rooms are located in the basement; the upper rooms, that is the rooms associated with the reliefs S'–V', were located on the ground floor. These rooms must have been located next to, rather than on, the basement rooms. It would have been impossible to place reliefs on top of room S without them crashing down. The upper rooms were thus regular ground floor rooms.

Manuelli (2009), have added details and improved upon Turner. There are nonetheless still several problems with these attempts. In any typology one of the basic questions concerns the criteria by which differences are defined as significant. Typologies have the tendency to mix different criteria. Several kinds of typologies are conceivable when it comes to palatial spaces. The most obvious are architectural and functional in nature. Most typologies have been predominantly architectural, focusing on morphology.

Turner distinguishes between the “Principal Reception Suite,” which forms his designation for the Throneroom Suite, and six other types. This is still a valid representation of our understanding of Late Assyrian palaces, in which the Throne-room Suite stands out as the only suite whose designation seems beyond doubt, simply because the architectural setting for a throne has been preserved, though not the throne itself. Nonetheless, several rooms were designed to accommodate thrones, basically turning them into thronerooms as well. Functionally speaking, each room where a throne was placed can be called a throneroom even when the room was not fitted with each permanent installation seen in the morphologically defined throne-room.

Turner’s other types are functionally less clear and are assigned letters as a means to distinguish them. They are mostly categorized on the basis of morphological aspects with the range of rooms forming the main guiding principle. Reception Suite Type A is basically the catchall category, which contains all suites consisting of two rows of rooms. Types B–F represents the larger suites, but are only populated by a few examples each. The differences between types B–D are negligible, whereas type E is represented only by the fragmentarily known Town Wall Palace in Kalḫu. Reception Suite Type F is typified by its position within the palace.

Turner does not state the aim of his typology, aside from noting that Late Assyrian palaces show remarkable similarities that could be categorized. Except for the Throne-room Suite, none of the other types seem to have any intrinsic value, except for those interested in morphology. The range of rooms, and thus the size of the suite, is unlikely to have been functionally significant.

While we normally cannot assign specific functions to suites, one can trace some relevant differences that could correspond to the potential uses a suite was able to accommodate. The typology presented here, based primarily on the notion of agglutination and secondarily on location, is intended to assist in this goal. Each type is based on an architectural core that provides significance and coherence. Two of the resulting types follow Turner: the Principal Reception Suite and Reception Suite Type F. Three further types of suites can be designated. Some of these types are defined by more than just architectural aspects, but are also found at specific locations within the palace.

This new typology should not be used too rigidly. Some suites share aspects of different types and several suites appear to be unique. Such suites indicate that the heterogeneity is greater than our typology would suggest. Nonetheless, the clustering

of the palatial suites into the proposed types seems too consistent to be meaningless. The similarity between palaces and the tradition in the architecture of suites is certainly not random and must correlate, at least to some extent, to a consistency in use.

The Throneroom Suite

The Throneroom Suite consists of a throneroom, a ramp and an internal room that connected to an inner courtyard. Later Throneroom Suites possessed a bathroom next to the throne dais. The architectural differences between Throneroom Suites were minimal, making it one of the most conservative spaces of the Late Assyrian period. The suite was two-sided and could be entered from the main forecourt (i.e. the Throneroom Courtyard) and an inner courtyard. A strong hierarchical difference existed between the two sides, with the throneroom clearly forming the front of the suite. The two-sidedness did allow the throneroom to be entered from the back. Such back entries were rare in the other suites, which usually only possessed a frontal way of entering. The arrangement seen in the Throneroom Suite was not exclusive to the king. Most elite residences, especially those from Dur-Sharruken (Loud and Altman 1938), possessed a similar set of rooms.

The Double-Sided Reception Suite

The Double-Sided Reception Suite is located behind the Throneroom Suite and represents Turner's Reception Suite Type F.⁵ The core of the suite consists of two reception rooms, usually separated by a T-shaped series of rooms. The suite is defined by its two-sidedness, which allowed its two reception rooms to be accessed from two directions. Though its two sides are comparable, their place within the palace created differences in accessibility. Its "external" side is always directly accessible from the Throneroom Courtyard through a corridor.⁶ This "external" reception room forms a secondary throneroom. The "internal" reception room is located along an inner courtyard and is often connected internally to the Throne-room Suite.

5 Double-Sided Reception Suites were found in Kalḫu's Northwest Palace (Fig. 1), Kalḫu's Military Palace (rooms T10 and T20–28), Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken (Fig. 2), The Military Palace at Dur-Sharruken (Palace F, rooms 16–19) and probably in the palace at Til-Barsip (rooms 44–47).

6 The "external" reception room is indicated by an encircled "E" on the plans. The "internal" reception room is indicated by an encircled "I" on the plans

The Residential/Reception Suites

The core of this type of suite is formed by a large room combined with a bathroom. The bathroom usually takes up one-third of this core. The absolute and relative size of these bathrooms is remarkable and might from our perspective seem like a waste of precious space, but it was clearly an essential and important room. This core probably represents the minimum requirements to be able to talk of a residential suite. It could be enlarged to create more monumental suites. It is doubtful whether suites without a bathroom had residential uses. Single rooms are usually better understood as storage spaces.

We should certainly be cautious in using the word residential. First, we do not know the exact uses of spaces, in part because their original furnishing has not been preserved. Second, it is unlikely that pure bedrooms existed. We should assume that most spaces were multifunctional. The more monumental suites clearly served as spaces for receptions and other court activity, possessing reliefs, elaborate wall paintings, tram-rails, etc. Nonetheless, one can argue that it is this type of suite that was most suitable for sleeping regardless of the other uses it might also have possessed.

Whether this type of suite can be called residential is probably partly dependent on its location. Suites located in the most accessible parts of the palace are more likely to have formed the office of palace functionaries and are less likely to have been residential in nature. Many officials will have worked on a daily basis within the palace. The more important among them appear to have possessed their own offices. One of the most common and monumental offices was located in the corner of the Throneroom Courtyard, often close to the main entrance. The best preserved “corner office” was found in the Northwest Palace of Kalḫu (Fig. 1, Rooms ZT 21, 25–27 and perhaps ZT 32–34). Another one may be reconstructed in the Military Palace of Kalḫu (Rooms SE 21–23). Everything within Sargon’s palace in Dur-Sharruken is architecturally unclear (Fig. 3), but Rooms 131–33 could represent a similar office. Entrance courtyards seem to have possessed their own corner offices, for example, Rooms 92–95 in Sargon’s palace in Dur-Sharruken and Rooms NW 1–3, NE 51–54 in the Military Palace of Kalḫu.

The most monumental Residential/Reception Suites of the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu (Fig. 1, Rooms S–X) and the Southwest Palace in Nineveh (Fig. 4, Rooms 7–8) can be argued to be somewhat different. Their similarity is remarkable, especially if one considers the considerable changes in the architecture between both palaces. The architecture of the suite in the Northwest Palace was typical for that palace. The suite of the Southwest Palace was, however, unique within the palace precisely because it was so similar to the suite of the Northwest Palace. At least in these two palaces, it can be argued that these suites represented the King’s Suite. They formed the most monumental Residential/Reception Suites and were thus likely intended for the king. Their locations within the palace were comparable. Both surrounded the courtyard behind the Throneroom Suite and were positioned between the monumental part and the more residential/service area of the palace.

Service Quadrants

Many royal palaces possess square units consisting of smaller rooms surrounding a courtyard. They are found in the palace of Tarbiṣu (Miglus, forthcoming), can be reconstructed in the Southwest Palace of Nineveh (Fig. 4; Reade 2000: fig. 11) and potentially in Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken (Fig. 2). None of these quadrants has been properly excavated and/or published. Their inventories and possible installations are unknown. They were residential in nature and/or intended as service units. They are always located next to the monumental suites, set apart and closely connected to the outside. The small size of their rooms and their location in the center of the palace seems to make them quite suitable for service functions such as kitchens, which are otherwise lacking.

The Dual-Core Suite

The fifth general type of suite can be called the Dual-Core Suite. It consisted of two central rooms of similar length, with the internal room often being somewhat less wide, surrounded by different kinds of spaces. The agglutinative nature of Late Assyrian suites is especially pronounced in these suites, which could possess an especially high number of attachments.

Dual-Core Suites appeared for the first time in Sargon's palace in Dur-Sharruken. They became common in later royal palaces. Most such suites were found in the Southwest Palace of Nineveh, which contained at least five suites of this type.⁷ Rooms F-I of Nineveh's North Palace appear to have formed a small Dual-Core Suite as well (Barnett 1976: pl. 6). The only known suite of Esarhaddon's Southwest Palace in Kalḫu was similar in nature (Layard 1849: pl. 100). In the more monumental Dual-Core Suites, large rooms were placed perpendicular to the central ones, basically expanding the core with one or two additional rooms.

This type of suite does not so much represent a functional category, but rather a changed architectural idiom. It coincided with the emergence of a set of interrelated architectural features that transformed the functioning of Late Assyrian palatial spaces. These changes can be summarized as an increased fluidity of the internal space. This was achieved by increasing the number of internal doors, aligning them with those on the outside and, if present, with those further inside. These internal doors were often wider than the internal doors in earlier palaces. Some doors could no longer be closed and were filled with columns, which could rest on statues (for example, in Esarhaddon's Southwest Palace in Kalḫu; see Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. CVIII–CIX). The increased fluidity and monumentality of the interior did not

7 (1) rooms 9 and 10, (2) rooms 24–27, (3) rooms 29–41; (4) rooms 51s–59; (5) rooms 65–68.

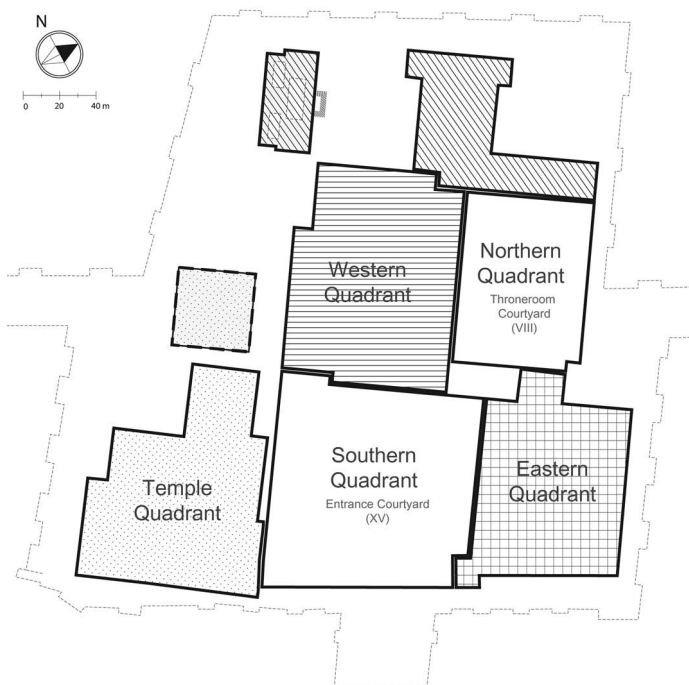


Figure 3: Schematic plan of Sargon's Palace in Dur-Sharruken showing the different quadrants of the palace. Drawn by author.

change the relation to the outside. Even though the suite was more permeable, with the aligned doors creating visual axes from the outside, the external facades were as closed as they had been throughout the Late Assyrian period.

This suite can alternatively be interpreted as a rearranged Double-Sided Reception Suite, whose two reception rooms are joined. This removed the double-sidedness and forced the attached rooms to surround the core. The consistency of having two reception rooms in one suite seems noteworthy. If functionally significant, it would suggest that the two rooms of the Double-Sided Reception Suite were intended to be used simultaneously, at least sometimes. Both types of suites could accommodate a similar amount of people, but played out the related hierarchies of distance differently.

Making a Palace from the Available Suites

It is sometimes assumed that the Assyrian king was inaccessible and located deep inside his own palace (see, for example, Grayson 1986: 10; Parpola 2000: 30). Access was certainly curtailed, for instance by locating palaces on citadels, but seclusion does

not appear to have been an important architectural principle. The throneroom, the preeminent room of the king, was always the first state apartment encountered when entering the palace. It meant that the royal throne was only one door away from the most accessible part of the palace. Being near does not necessarily represent an ease of access, but it is clearly not a sign of seclusion. The throneroom can be understood as embodying a closeness to the king, regardless of his physical presence. This pattern continues with respect to the Residential/Reception Suites. The most monumental suite of this type, and thus most likely to have belonged to the king, was the first such suite to be encountered. Both the Throneroom Suite and the King's Suite possessed a threshold quality within the palace, placing the king to the fore in his own palace.

The palaces are typically thought to have been divided into a public and a private realm. This duality is often expressed in modern scholarship by means of the Akkadian words *bābānu* and *bētānu* (for example, Heinrich 1984; Postgate 2004: 222). There are two problems with this assumed duality. First, the duality is absent from the Late Assyrian textual sources, making it a modern construct. Attestations of the Akkadian terms can best be understood as referring to the inside and outside of the palace (Kertai, forthcoming b). Second, the existence of private and public spaces or zones seems doubtful. These are modern concepts whose heuristic value when describing the Late Assyrian period is dubious. Viewing space through the lens of zoning represents a Modernist approach. It forms an unnecessary layer in the spatial analysis of these palaces.

Spatial analyses are best done on the level of the suites. Late Assyrian palaces can be described as a combination of independent suites that were pavilion-like in their organization. They were, however, not articulated as such. Visually, the different suites were all integrated within the larger palace. Most suites were accessible from a courtyard and could only be entered from one side.⁸ Suites were autonomous in the sense that they did not depend on other suites or rooms for their accessibility. One did not need to pass through one suite to reach another suite. This independence was achieved by connecting all courtyards through corridors.

Three types of corridors are especially noteworthy. The “throneroom corridor” lay next to the throneroom and connected the Throneroom Courtyard with the rest of the palace, thereby circumventing the throneroom. Thus, though the throneroom was the first monumental reception room to be encountered, one did not need to pass through it to reach the rest of the palace. The “temple corridor” connected one of the forecourts with the main temple precinct next to the palace.⁹ “Descending corridors”

⁸ The Throneroom Suite, The Double-Sided Reception Suite and the King's Suite are among the few suites possessing multiple entrances. These, however, represent only a small sample of all palace suites.

⁹ A “temple corridor” was found in Kalḫu's Northwest Palace (room ZT 2), in Dur-Sharruken's Royal Palace (room 90) and Nineveh's Southwest Palace (only the reliefs associated with this corridor were found, they are nowadays designated as IT; see Barnett *et al.* 1998: pls. 658–74).

connected the center of the palace with the outside, providing a side entrance into the palace.¹⁰

The pavilion-like structure of the palace had two main consequences. First, routing in the palaces was dependent on corridors and courtyards. This routing was direct and concentrated along only a few corridors. This facilitated control and made it easy for areas to be closed off if so desired.¹¹ The alternation of relatively dark corridors and light courtyards funneled movement through the palace. This will have made the monumentality of the courtyards even more striking. The corridors were located, one could say hidden, in the corners of courtyards and do not seem to have differed architecturally from the smaller entrances into the nearby suites. The second consequence of this spatial organization was the absence of alternative routes within the palace. Routing was mostly predetermined both within each suite as well as in the palace at large.

These characteristics typified the organization of all Late Assyrian royal palaces. Differences were nonetheless many. It cannot have been easy to combine the conflicting requirements of pomp and circumstance, security, tradition, seclusion and practicality. The rest of this article will look at the three primary royal palaces of the Late Assyrian period in order to trace the main differences and continuities in their architecture.

Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Kalḫu

The Northwest Palace (Fig. 1) is the only Late Assyrian royal palace whose inner parts are largely known (though see below). The palace was organized linearly, with the main entrance being located in the northern part of the palace, east of the Throneroom Courtyard. Further east additional forecourts could have existed (Kertai 2013: 11–13; Postgate and Reade 1976–1980: 311; Reade 2002: 196). The Throneroom Courtyard was, as always, centered on the facade of the throneroom.

Two monumental suites lay behind the Throneroom Suite – the suite centered on Room G (here called the Eastern Suite) and a Double-Sided Reception Suite to the west. Together these three suites formed the State Apartments of the palace. They surrounded an inner courtyard (Y). The primary rooms of these suites contained several features also found within the throneroom and were therefore strongly associated with the king. These include the placement of the king's image in the middle of the short wall, an internal and external door in close proximity and an axial approach from the opposite side of the room through a vestibule.

¹⁰ A “descending corridor” was found in Kalḫu's Military Palace (rooms R1-R7), Nineveh's Southwest Palace (room 51n) and Nineveh's North Palace (rooms A, R, S and W).

¹¹ For the officials in charge of security within the palace see Radner 2010.

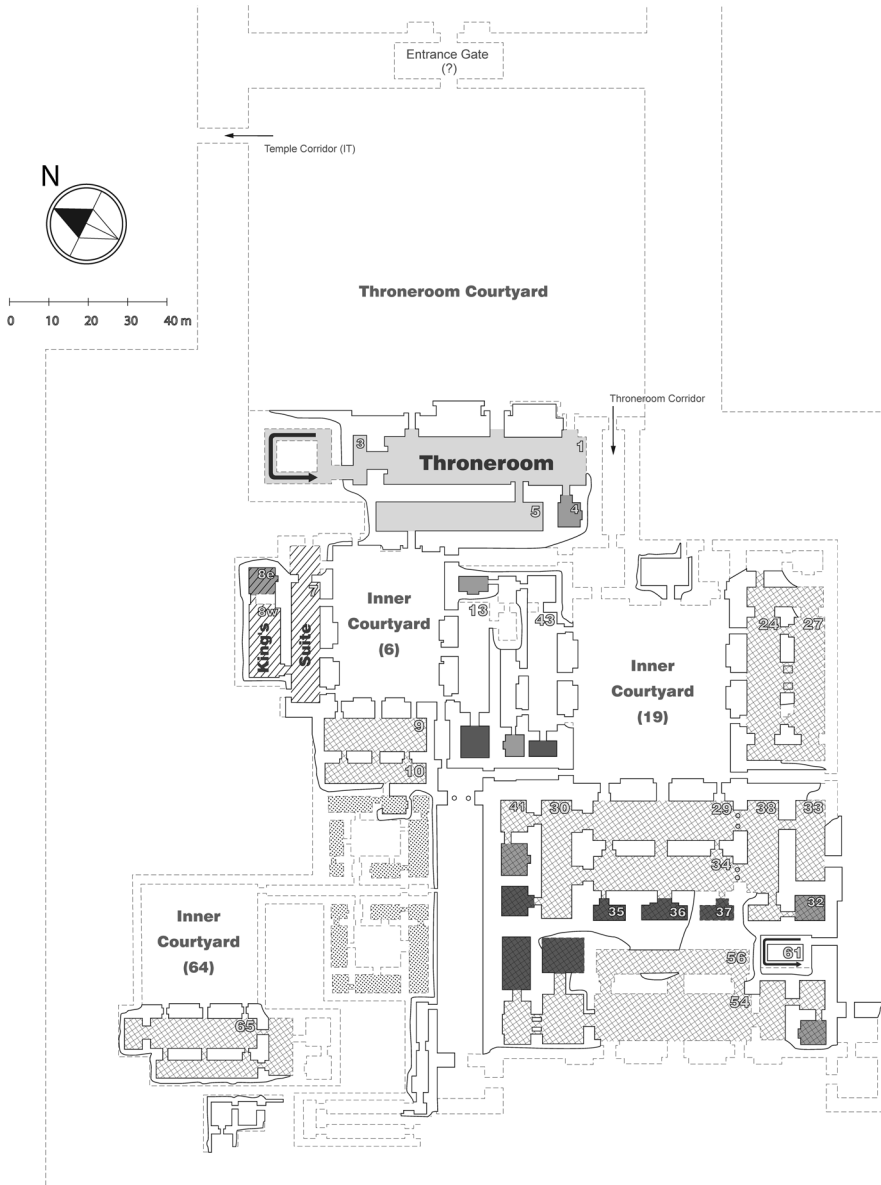


Figure 4: Floorplan of Southwest Palace in Nineveh. Drawn by author, based on Layard 1853b: pl. 71.

The palace shows a predilection for asymmetry, which manifests itself in irregularly placed doors, the organization of facades and the general absence of spatial axes. The pavilion quality of Late Assyrian palaces was countered in this palace by an inner route surrounding Courtyard Y, which connected all four major suites surrounding

this courtyard. This route seems circular, but the direction in which the apotropaic figures within its doors face suggests that it emanated from the throneroom (Kertai, forthcoming a). It can thus be associated with the king (Russell 1998: 714). The added internal connections are absent in later palaces.

The architecture of the Eastern Suite seems unique in the corpus of Late Assyrian architecture. The suite is unusual both for its architecture as well as for the topics depicted on its reliefs (Russell 1998). Room G is, architecturally speaking, a typical reception room, with Room H functioning as its retiring room. The number of rooms attached to Room H (that is, Rooms I-M and R) is, however, atypical for such a room. Rooms I-M and R were all paved, but can be divided into two bathrooms and five storage spaces. While attention is usually concentrated on the bathrooms, the quantity of storage spaces may be more remarkable. They could have stored items needed for rituals and other events taking place in the suite, but could also represent a primary function, for instance as treasuries (especially Room K). These functions are not mutually exclusive. The suite seems to have integrated receptions, storage and purifications (Brandes 1970; Russell 1998).¹²

It could be argued that the suite represents a predecessor of the Dual-Core Suite as they appear in Sargonic period palaces.¹³ The Eastern Suite can similarly be interpreted as having a core of two main rooms to which a series of other units were attached. The core of the suite was not organized as regularly and symmetrically as the later Dual-Core suites, but this correlates to the general absence of symmetry in this palace. While such association provides few clues for understanding the use of the suite it would suggest that it was not as unique as it appears to be. The main problem with this association is the absence of a similar suite in Sargon's Royal Palace in Dur-Sharruken. This makes its historical continuity somewhat problematic.

The absence of similar apotropaic scenes in later Dual-Core suites is not necessarily functionally significant. No later palace blanketed its walls with apotropaic figures in a similar way as the Northwest Palace did. Attitudes to decoration, and the protection by apotropaic figures, were much more differentiated than architectural ones. Decoration often seems only weakly correlated to the use of spaces, though the link may have been stronger in the Northwest Palace.

Two corridors, BB/Z in the west and P in the east, separated the State Apartments from the southern part of the palace. The southern part can be reconstructed as the service area of the palace. The area contained storage spaces, the burials of several Assyrian queens (Hussein and Suleiman 2000; Curtis *et al.* 2008) and a few suites. The southern part was organized around a single circular route that consisted of a series of courtyards in the south and Corridors BB/Z and P in the north. Corridors BB/Z and P

¹² For alternative reconstructions see Brown 2010; Richardson 1999–2001.

¹³ Turner (1970a: 200–202, n. 120; 1998: 29–30) already argued that this suite could be compared to the suite surrounding Room 29 in Sennacherib's Southwest Palace.

formed the only direct connection between the State Apartments and the southern part of the palace.

Between both areas lay two more monumental suites (S-X and AF, 59–61). The suite surrounding Room S can be identified as the King's Suite.¹⁴ The suite surrounding Room AF represents the second most monumental Residential/Reception Suite and could therefore have belonged to the queen. The associated Courtyard AJ can be described as the residential courtyard of the palace. Together with the King's Suite, the suites surrounding it represent most of the known Residential/Reception Suites found in the palace. This residential courtyard was directed towards the State Apartments. It was not directly connected to the southern service area of the palace.

The Royal Palace of Sargon II (722–705 BCE) at Dur-Sharruken

The Northwest Palace remained the primary palace of the empire for approximately 150 years until Sargon finished his new palace in Dur-Sharruken (Kertai 2013: 11–18). Sargon's palace is organized into an irregular square, subdivided into four quadrants (Fig. 3). Two quadrants are taken up by large courtyards. The southern quadrant forms the Entrance Courtyard (XV), whereas the northern quadrant represents the Throneroom Courtyard (VIII). The eastern quadrant was occupied by service functions. What we would normally consider a Late Assyrian royal palace only occupies the two northwestern quadrants (Fig. 2). This area contained most functions that were present in other royal palaces and can therefore be described as the palace proper. A fifth quadrant, to the southwest, is formed by the main temple precinct. This scheme is unique within the corpus of Late Assyrian architecture.

The size of the western quadrant is similar to the Northwest Palace south of its Throneroom Courtyard. Its constitutive parts are also comparable. Most decorations that must once have existed have disappeared, but some general tendencies in their application are nonetheless noticeable. These considerations are mostly based on the excavations carried out by Botta (1849). In comparison to the Northwest Palace two aspects stand out. First, the reliefs in Sargon's palace put the emphasis on other, partly new, subjects. Apotropaic figures are used sporadically and more strategically. Their absence seems partly substituted by an increased amount of military scenes, but the most striking change is the increased number of courtiers on the walls of the palace. The palace put more emphasis on the Assyrian elite and their relations with the king. The largest beneficiaries of these new subjects were courtiers and the crown prince

¹⁴ Reade (1980: 84) was the first to assign this suite to the king; Russell (1998: 697–99) later came to the same conclusion.

Sennacherib. The images of the crown prince were almost as numerous as those of the king, often forming a joint scene with the crown prince standing in front of the king in his role of introducing courtiers, tribute bearers and prisoners. The second main development in the decoration of the palace is to be found in the monumental courtyards, which were now decorated with figurative reliefs throughout.

The increased amount of State Apartments could no longer be grouped around a single courtyard. The additional suites were placed on the western edge of the palace on and around the terrace. The circulation patterns necessarily are more complex as direct connections between all suites are no longer possible. The Inner Courtyard (VI) behind the throneroom was still surrounded by State Apartments, but the additional monumental suites were placed on the palace terrace. A Double-Sided Reception Suite was located in its usual position behind the throneroom. While the basic features of this suite can readily be identified, the suite had only a few associated spaces, and it seems unlikely that further spaces can be reconstructed.

The terrace is dominated by a large protruding suite. It is by far the largest suite within the palace, consisting of eleven rooms. It represents the only suite in the palace whose architecture and decoration are well preserved. At first sight, the suite might appear to have been a monumental version of a Double-Sided Reception Suite, with the additional rooms being extensions of the familiar central part. Some of these extensions formed a typical Residential/Reception Suite (Rooms 6, 9 and 11–12). Within the unique organization of this suite can be traced the emergence of a different spatial conception that would become common in the seventh century, especially in the form of the Dual-Core Suites. The complexity of the suite formed a departure from the principles that had typified, and would continue to be common within, Late Assyrian palace architecture. Late Assyrian palatial suites had always been characterized by routes that branched out, mostly ending in dead ends. After entering a suite, routing was predetermined, with internal rooms usually only possessing a single door. This suite differed by introducing alternative routes. This was further enhanced by the multiplication of external entrances. This fundamentally changed the way movement and access could be organized. The internal rooms, oriented perpendicularly in relation to each other, increased the size of these suites. The added internal connections and related fluidity of space would become more pronounced during the seventh century, but would largely remain an internal aspect of architecture. With a few notable exceptions, usually found in corridors, Assyrian architecture would not open up towards the outside.

The Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh

Less than a year after the inauguration of Sargon's palace, Sennacherib started construction on a new royal city following the death of his father. He did not return to Kalḫu, but chose to expand the ancient city of Nineveh. Even though Sargon's Royal

Palace had been more monumental than its predecessor, it seems that it was already insufficient the moment it was inaugurated (among other possible motives for his move). The Southwest Palace (Fig. 4) drastically increased the quantity of monumental suites. Its suites were larger and their interiors more monumental and fluid. The expansion of the State Apartments was accompanied by a shift away from the courtyard behind the throneroom. Whereas Sargon had focused on the palace terrace, the Southwest Palace introduced additional internal courtyards. The organization of the Southwest Palace can be summarized as a combination of interlocking zones emanating from the Throneroom Courtyard and centered on different internal courtyards. This allowed the different zones of the palace to be separated from each other, while keeping the distances between them to a minimum.

The decoration of the Southwest Palace differed from Sargon's Royal Palace in multiple ways (Russell 1991: 179–222). Some of these changes can be described as a homogenization. Whereas Sargon's palace introduced a wide range of topics on its reliefs, the Southwest Palace used only military campaigns to decorate its rooms. Any correlation that might have existed between the use of rooms and the topics depicted on its walls were no longer present. Only courtyards and corridors depicted other topics, such as the procurement of building material (Russell 1987). A second homogenization occurred in the doors. Sargon's palace had used apotropaic figures intermittently and strategically. The doors of the Southwest Palace were, however, protected by apotropaic figures throughout (Ornan 2004).

In the suite surrounding Rooms 7 and 8 one can recognize the King's Suite. It was probably the most monumental Residential/Reception Suite of the palace, but is currently the only such suite known. Its organization is atypical for this palace, but similar to the King's Suite in Assurnasirpal's Northwest Palace. The traditionalism of the King's Suite is especially remarkable in a palace where only a few suites still bore a resemblance to the suites of the Northwest Palace.

Courtyard 19 forms the largest courtyard behind the throneroom. It is surrounded by some of the most monumental suites within the palace. The largest, and therefore probably most important, suite was formed by Rooms 29 to 41. It represents a Dual-Core Suite comprised of a large number of attachments surrounding a core of Rooms 29 and 34. It formed the location of the two most famous discoveries made within this palace: the Lachish reliefs in Room 36 (Ussishkin 1982) and Assurbanipal's library (Room 41). Its core was expanded by two perpendicular rooms (30 and 38) placed on either end. This created secondary routes between the two central rooms, while also giving access to additional rooms. The monumentality and organization of this suite are unprecedented for a Late Assyrian palatial suite.

The floorplan of the western part of the palace is mostly unknown. The area was separated from the state apartments, but did not lack in monumental suites. The area contained at least one large courtyard (64), whose dimensions seem comparable to the courtyard behind the throneroom. Only the suite occupying the western side of this courtyard is known. Inscriptions indicate it to have been built for Queen Tashme-

tum-sharrat (Galter *et al.* 1986: 31–32). The themes used for the reliefs in Courtyard 64 and Room 65 continue the military themes seen throughout the palace (Layard 1853a: 584–86). Nothing in its decoration or architecture is stereotypically “feminine,” nor indicates that its inhabitant was lacking in status or power. On the contrary, the preserved architecture is comparable with the monumentality seen in other parts of the palace. The suite does not appear to have been residential in nature, but represents a standard Dual-Core Suite, resembling the suites surrounding Rooms 9/10 and 24/27 in size as well as in its known organization. Courtyard 64 was, however, relatively far removed from the other state apartments. Like most other royal palaces an external entrance could have existed in this area, as suggested by Turner (1998: 36).

Conclusion

What we call Late Assyrian palace architecture is likely a continuation of older traditions, which originated early, probably in the centuries after 1200 BCE. These traditions were undoubtedly inspired by surrounding cultures and traditions. Babylonian interactions are likely to have been the most influential, but cannot be followed due to a lack of known Babylonian architecture. Several influences can be traced to the so-called Neo-Hittite and Aramaean kingdoms west of Assyria. The Assyrians selectively incorporated aspects from these cultures, most famously the use of decorated orthostats, which they transformed into internal decorations (Bonatz 2004: 399). The pavilion-like organization of Late Assyrian palaces may also have been influenced by these palaces (Brown 2008: 219–20).

Late Assyrian royal palaces show a tendency toward “Assyrianization” similar to what has been discussed for other arts (Feldman 2011: 142–43; Thomason 2005: 140–45). Feldman’s description of this process as “the making of something other into something Assyrian” seems to be a good description of the traceable Neo-Hittite and Aramaean influences. This Assyrianization can be described as part of the identity formation of Assyria’s elite, but must also represent distinctly Assyrian uses of space related to the organization of its court and associated protocol.

The idea of a Late Assyrian royal palace is remarkably consistent over time, which makes the corpus easily recognizable. Once the notion of an Assyrian palace emerged, architectural changes appear to have been generally avoided. Most changes were incremental, but the resulting differences between the Northwest Palace in Kalḫu and the North Palace in Nineveh are considerable. Most changes can be understood as consequences of the increased number and size of the State Apartments. This necessitated new ways of organizing the palace. The main increase in monumentality occurred inside the suites, which expanded in size, became more fluid and were decorated more lavishly. These changes are likely to reflect changed palace activities, which emerged during the Late Assyrian period, especially in the seventh century.

From an architectural viewpoint the palaces can be described as conservative. While full of creative solutions, the conservatism of its spaces and key architectural principles must have been intentional. Each Late Assyrian royal palace can be defined as a multiplicity of suites, each with its own, quite stable, role to play within the palace. The suites themselves were made through a process of agglutination, but so was the palace itself, which consisted of individual pavilions, merged into a single ensemble and connected through corridors and courtyards. This resulted in a lack of alternative routing within the palace. In combination, these principles created palaces that are easily recognizable as Late Assyrian. Their conservatism was selective and much less pronounced in their decorations, whose placement and topics differed considerably.

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Ann Shafer

The Assyrian Landscape as Ritual

Abstract: The modern engagement of “landscape” as a concept and reality is historically constituted; nevertheless, it appears to be especially relevant to the study of the ancient Assyrians, who inhabited a vast realm. The ancients themselves did not use an all-encompassing term such as “landscape,” but rather, described individual features of the lands they traversed. These records are found in monumental royal texts and images, previously interpreted as either empirical or symbolic in nature and importance. Historicist, aesthetics-based and ideological approaches to palace visual culture are here reframed, and are replaced with a multi-level interpretive paradigm. Using ritual as a lens, one alternative reading is proposed, namely, that the Assyrian landscape belonged to the phenomenal realm of the dedicatory, and thus that both its traversal and representation in text and image were essential agents for the constitution of place and kingship.

Keywords: Assyrian, cosmology, landscape, liminal, narrative, ritual

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Introduction

This paper lays the groundwork for an alternative approach to the study of Late Assyrian palace imagery by plotting two of its seemingly unrelated aspects on the same course: landscape and ritual. In Late Assyrian (883–627 BCE) monumental royal architecture, visual imagery and texts – on walls, doors, and freestanding monuments – defined the space and experience. One of the most prominent themes in such spaces was the landscape: topographical land features including waterways, mountainous terrain, and vegetation. All too often overshadowed by the human narratives that take place within them – mostly royal scenes of battle or the hunt – these landscapes have traditionally been assumed to be subordinate background or setting. Here, however, that trend is reversed, and these landscapes are instead explored as significant in their own right, indeed, as fully encompassing in purpose and effect. To state it more radically, Assyrian palace narratives are here presented not in usual fashion as “military” narratives or as “hunting” narratives – although they do include these themes – but as *landscape* narratives, stories that take place first and foremost in and for the sake of the landscape.

As a corollary to this notion that landscape imagery played a defining role in Assyrian architectural experience, so might the same be said of ritual. That is, Assyrian

monumental architectural structures – palaces, temples, and even cities – were constructed, dedicated, and inhabited as part of a highly ritualized environment. Buildings hosted a variety of rituals – from those performed to purify and protect the structure, to elaborate state ceremonies. Although the details are not yet fully understood, monumental texts and images also appear to have played a role in ritual processes, and buildings themselves were ritual offerings to the gods. Here our knowledge of Assyrian ritual is used as a lens to discern alternative architectural meanings, especially those related to the theme of landscape. Ultimately, at the intersection of evolving models of landscape, object agency, and phenomenological experience, the Assyrian monumental landscape narratives – and the journeys they depict – are reframed as embodied ritual practice and transformation.

Landscape: Definitions and Scope

At the beginning of any such juxtaposition of concepts, definitions clarify a sense of purpose. In the case of the “landscape,” although its modern engagement as a concept is historically constituted from post-Renaissance visual paradigms and ideals, it nevertheless appears to be relevant on some level to the study of the ancient Assyrians, who inhabited vast territories frequently depicted in texts and images. The term “landscape” is an umbrella term that is widely understood yet rarely defined. Generally speaking, a landscape is the natural place from which people gain their fundamental sense of identity and temporality, and as a concept and reality, is ultimately derived from, and pertains to, the realm of the visual (Schwarzer 2003: 86). Edward Casey believes that any representation we might consider a landscape – “a natural scene, where human/divine actions are presented in its terms” – belongs exclusively to the modern era, and that natural settings depicted in ancient images are not landscapes at all, but rather, are narrative “scenery” (2002: 5). Of course, the Assyrians themselves did not use an all-encompassing term such as “landscape,” nor did they imbue their images with any such modern readings or purpose. Nevertheless, topographies large and small were surprisingly integral to their worldview, and present an important opportunity for our revision of the concept.

More important than either defending or rejecting our modern terminology for the ancient Assyrians, is instead, a critical awareness of its long-term effects. So far, as a product of its times, the Assyrian “landscape” has tended to evoke scholarly approaches that prioritize literal, historicist readings of surfaces and their deceptions. The study of Assyrian culture belongs to the realms of philology, archaeology, and art history, and currently running through all three of these disciplines are two interrelated scholarly attitudes toward the landscape. On the one hand, the landscape is posited as *real*, such that its constituent parts may be empirically identified, named, and investigated. This approach ultimately locates its origins in the six-

teenth-century determinist mapping impulse that viewed the landscape as flat, knowable surfaces within bounded territories. In the second approach – traced through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century utopian aesthetics – the landscape is seen as *symbolic*, evoking social and especially political realms of thought and action. Ultimately, the Assyrian landscape as we know it is, by definition, imbued with associations of pleasure and power, perfection and danger (Bender 2006: 303; Kirby 2009: 7).

In philology, studies of the “real” Assyrian landscape have constituted literal readings of royal texts including architectural inscriptions, letters, and other written sources. In this endeavor the abundant references to specific place names have been mapped onto Western-style maps of the Middle East, resulting in a fairly consistently understood picture of the regions and boundaries (Parpola and Porter 2001). The resulting historical geography is a documentation of peoples and goods, political entities, topographical features, and geographical boundaries, against which pictorial imagery and new archaeological finds may be measured. In his study of the Assyrian rural landscape, for example, Mario Fales (1990) provides a comprehensive summary of what we know from texts about cities and their rural environs, and how they were organized topographically, administratively, and juridically. Such readings discern larger organizational trends as well as details about topographical features, pathways, and ownership boundaries. Although data may be limited, the goal of such studies is to bring “order” to an otherwise unruly distant universe.

In concert with philology, archaeology also reveals an Assyrian landscape that is real, not only in a strictly material sense, but also in its search to understand social, economic, and political trends. Studies in “landscape archaeology” use intensive archaeological surveys with satellite image analysis to examine issues of urbanization, agricultural production, local and long-distance exchange, and the spatial configuration of social relations and settlement ecologies (Morandi Bonacossi 1996). According to a recent report by Tony Wilkinson (2005) and team, a “distinctive landscape imprint” of Assyria is now quite clear, and is characterized by certain distinctive shifts in scale and distribution of cities, infrastructure, and agricultural production. In part, this methodological approach attempts to ground textual accounts of real places within a knowledge of regionally specific landscape processes, and much like the philological approach to historical geography, results in measurable, quantifiable maps of the Assyrian lands.

In art historical analysis, the search for the Assyrian real is quite well established, and is arguably both the foundation of the discipline of Assyrian studies as well as a continuous driving force. The earliest excavators, for example, were keen on describing and identifying what the emerging wall reliefs depicted, a kind of typology of the foreign unknown (Layard 1859). Notably, this interest has experienced a slight resurgence in recent decades, especially in the service of the second, and perhaps now dominant approach outlined here – the *symbolic*. That is, recent scholars such as John Russell (1991), Michelle Marcus (1995), and Allison Thomason (2001), for example,

accept the phenomenon of the real landscape, but have, at the same time, discerned a parallel “imagined” landscape universe – one that is closely tied to visual program, politically driven. This body of scholarship stems directly from the watershed studies of Irene Winter (1981, 1983), who identified the landscape regions represented in Assurnasirpal II’s Northwest Palace throne room and then deciphered their “program” of symbolic imagery. Amidst the geographically-ordered images of specific regions, she argued, viewers to the throne room experienced not only the immediate palace space, but also, symbolically, a microcosm of the larger Assyrian realm. Furthermore, she concluded, the images probably played a key role in political constructions to persuade, or even coerce the viewer into submission.

In close dialogue with Winter’s work, the Italian “ideological” school of philology has had a widespread impact on Assyrian studies in recent decades. In the highly influential work of figures like Mario Liverani (1981) and Mario Fales (1981) the apparent political manipulation of Assyrian royal inscriptions indicates their propagandistic and imperialist intentions. As such, the search for “empire” still exerts considerable influence today, even in the realm of archaeology, where charismatic leaders are believed to have created and maintained “landscapes of power,” and political rhetoric is contextualized within larger trends of environmental and settlement change (Wilkinson et al. 2005).

While the Assyrian royal images and inscriptions contain both real and symbolic layers of meaning, the specific phenomenon of landscape representation presents an opportunity to re-evaluate our position in relation to ancient image-making, and therein, to discern additional layers of purpose and effect. As noted by Eric Hirsch (1995), for one, our focus on imperial history is limiting, and “reduces space to a stage,” ultimately obscuring more subtle place-making strategies at work. Echoing this sentiment, others have attempted to shift our concept of the landscape away from a static, historicist model of bounded surfaces to the notion of “process” and “event,” wherein places are continuously re-imagined and alternatively inhabited (Massey 2006; Harmansah 2012). It is within the context of this conceptual re-tooling that the present study acknowledges the Assyrian landscape images as encompassing a powerful attachment to land and location, embedded in uncharted, layered discourses and phenomena. Elsewhere I propose an alternative “performance” of Assyrian narrative reliefs as activating non-tangible processes of exchange and information (Shafer forthcoming b). Taking that same trajectory further, I will here explore how the represented landscape, in particular, might have had associations and functions beyond what we have imagined.

Of course, as part of the revisionary process, we must first release Assyrian landscape representations from the constraints of visual typology. That is, scholarship has tended to categorize and judge Assyrian representations of landscape according to formal properties, primarily the degree to which they adhere to spatial perspective and thus, to some degree of mimetic truthfulness. For example, one of the first scholars to deal with Assyrian palace images in any systematic way was Henriette

Groenewegen-Frankfort (1987), whose formalist approach to visual representation privileged spatial coherence. Although ultimately she rejected the Assyrian pictorial methods as eclectic, her emphasis on scale and composition has remained paradigmatic in the field. Admittedly, to devise a typological scheme based on formal properties is tempting, as the images do appear to contain certain patterns. But as is echoed in Groenewegen-Frankfort's hesitation, by definition, such typologies stem from contemporary assumptions about the mechanics of image construction and their intentions, and must be used with caution. Moreover, in the case of the Assyrians, an emphasis on formal properties has come to be associated with a particular reading of the subject matter (as human-centered), which in turn, stems from an even more fundamental belief about Assyrian image and text ontology (as political in intention and effect), and ultimately, about Assyrian character (as bloodthirsty, despotic, and "other"). Thus, although the typology is undeniably a part of our scholarly genealogy, when it comes to the landscape, its use first requires a deep excavation and revision.

So instead of getting sidetracked by the issue of mimesis, perhaps we might back up a bit and instead, underline the significance of the very presence of landscape as a subject matter at all. In other words, although we, as moderns, are accustomed to and expect the depiction of landscape settings, the Assyrians' distinct preference for this imagery was, at the time, completely new and unique within the Mesopotamian tradition. Literary and visual references to the land and its features had certainly been present in ancient Mesopotamia prior to this time, but the Assyrian version was particularly bold. Emerging early as an integral theme in ninth-century monumental architectural decoration and lasting for several centuries, individual landscape elements as well as full landscape scenes appear intentionally combined with very particular human narratives played out during the royal campaigns – battle, tribute collection, and the hunt. Although the human narratives are often repetitive and even generic, the landscapes are quite remarkably varied in both content and visual form, and thus effectively structure and enliven individual scenes and entire sequences (see also Brown, this volume).

Now, by "Assyrian" we mean largely Neo- or Late Assyrian; however, their Middle Assyrian forefathers also relished the landscape theme, which must have developed in relation to, for example, the simplified and abstracted landscape forms on portable objects such as seals (Matthews 1990). With the possible exceptions of an altar base from Assur (Moortgat 1969: fig. 247) and the "White Obelisk" from Nineveh (Pittman 1996), however, no monumental visual examples of landscape narrative survive. Instead, what does survive are references in Middle Assyrian royal inscriptions, as for example those of Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076), which contain repeated and often colorful evocations of perilous mountain passes, peaceful meadows, and torrential rivers (RIMA 2: 12–31). Although an extended discussion of such texts is not within the purview of this brief study, they nevertheless constitute a consistent bridge and parallel to the visual landscape images of the Late Assyrian phase.

In parallel with the texts, in the ninth century visual landscape imagery suddenly materializes and continues virtually unabated – and with increasing strength – through the entire Late Assyrian era. Every surviving set of monumental wall reliefs features it, as do bronze door bands and freestanding monuments. Even just a quick overview of the corpus of such images makes the force of this subject matter quite clear. Beginning at Nimrud on the wall reliefs of Assurnasirpal II's (883–859) palace throne room (Room B) and state apartments (West Wing), individual landscape elements as well as full landscape scenes appear, and certain lasting paradigms emerge (Meuszynski 1981; Paley and Sobolewski 1987). Views open onto uneven rocky landscapes, rolling hills, islands, and rivers. Vegetation is sparse, but includes vineyards, palm groves and orchards, and a tree-filled water's edge. The human narratives here – all military – are generic and repetitive, but the landscape creates variation and brings them to life. Beyond the palace, on the "Rassam Obelisk" appear excerpted landscape motifs (Börker-Klähn 1982: 183–84, fig. 138), and on bronze gate bands from Nimrud and the cult center of Imgur-Enlil (Balawat), the landscape threads through fortified hilltops and savanna hunting grounds (Barnett 2008: 106–107, 156–57, 196–98).

Although no wall reliefs survive from the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824) his Balawat temple door bands reveal a remarkable, deepening interest in landscape representation, as the early repertoire expands to include not only new motifs, but also new human actions in relation to them – especially those that elucidate the nature of the terrain (King 1915; Schachner 2007). For example, Assyrian soldiers are shown in a variety of situations: coaxing horses and chariots over steep mountain peaks, wading through deep tunnel waters, mounting a pontoon bridge to cross a wide, rushing river, and escorting captives through the forest. Although hunting landscapes are absent here, a forested game park on the "Black Obelisk" is most certainly an indication of its parallel use in other media (Börker-Klähn 1982: 190–91, fig. 152).

In the eighth century, the same basic landscape themes recur and develop with a continued sense of purpose. In the wall reliefs of Tiglath-Pileser III's (744–727) Central Palace, although we find at least one new locale (Babylonia), his renderings are consistent with the ninth-century examples, mostly representing the mountainous, forested, and sometimes aqueous terrain of fortified enemy settlements under siege (Barnett and Falkner 1962). In contrast, Sargon II's (721–705) reign is characterized by an increased interest in the general theme and bolder attempts to elaborate upon it. Several individual monuments depict the now familiar mountainous terrain and savanna vegetation: a thronebase from his new capital city of Dur-Sharrukin (Loud 1936: 66), bronze temple-door fragments also from Dur-Sharrukin (Reade 1995: 250; Loud and Altman 1938: pl. 50; Barnett et al. 2008: 199–200), and a glazed brick podium from Assur (Andrae 1925: pl. 6). Wall reliefs from his new palace, however, contain the most complete repertoire of landscape settings, with several rooms (Rooms 2, 3, 5, 13, 14) depicting a variety of mountain landscapes under military

attack, and with an unprecedented degree of detail and particularization (Albenda 1986). Moreover, new renderings of certain landscape types appear with great vigor, such as water scenes of timber transport (Façade n) and a forested hunting garden (Room 7). In these cases and others, royal artists take special delight in rendering the floral and faunal variety and in shifting our point of view to fully experience them.

Continuing these trends, in the seventh century the landscape flourishes, not only in terms of its frequency, but also with regard to its visual prominence. Of all the Assyrian landscape representations, Sennacherib's (704–681) have probably received the most scholarly attention, especially because of their formal experimentation. Here, however, they are noteworthy simply for what their sheer number indicates about the royal obsession with the theme (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998). From throughout his Southwest Palace at Nineveh come numerous examples of elaborate multi-slab sequences (Courts VI, XIX, LXIV; Rooms I, III, V, VII, X, XII, XXIX, XXIV, XXVIII, XXXII, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLIII, XLV, XLVI, XLVII, XLVIII, XLIX, LI, LXX), which depict traditional landscape motifs – such as rocky, undulating trails, riverine crossings, and groves of trees and forests – and also new topographies, including dense marshlands and abundant, fish-filled streams. Indeed, the degree of texture and particularized detail is remarkable vis-à-vis previous reigns, as is the interest in the various possible means of human habitation, which mostly include protracted military encounters, but also new activities in relation to the terrain, such as the extraction and transport of palace colossi from and across the land itself (Court VI).

Although from the reign of Esarhaddon (680–669) the archaeological record has left us little visual imagery – and no images of the landscape at all – from the reign of Assurbanipal (668–627) comes one final collection of visual riches (Barnett 1976; Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998). His wall reliefs – also exceptional in detail and organization – provide yet further elaboration on the landscape theme by depicting more extensively rendered and/or new locales, such as the date palm-rich landscape of Babylonia (Room M), and the meandering riverine and marsh settings of his Elamite campaigns (Southwest Palace Room XXXIII, and North Palace Rooms F, G, I, V₁). Also new is his clear preference for exotic flora and fauna, with the landscape now transformed into lush, sculpted game parks (Rooms C, E), and gardens (Rooms H and V₁).

After Assurbanipal, Assyrian monumental construction comes to a close and the particular Assyrian phenomenon of landscape representation disappears. Thus constituting an integral system of textual and visual expression distinct to its time and place, the represented Assyrian landscape certainly served important real and symbolic functions, and as such, was linked to the human narratives that took place within it. However, to note its integration with the human narratives is not, on its own, a means to explain its presence or force. Rather, tracing the phenomenon alongside the broader issue of palace ritual activity allows us to understand the landscape's primacy.

Landscape in Ritual Context

Although perhaps less materially obvious, ritual – like landscape – was also paradigmatic to the Assyrian point of view, and especially to architectural experience. In this section I will first outline the importance of ritual in Mesopotamian building construction and in Assyrian palaces, in particular. Then I will gather evidence for how Assyrian royal texts and images were themselves recipients of ritual activity as well as how they functioned as ritual agents. Ultimately, landscape images will not only be shown to have depicted images of royal ritual, but also to have themselves participated in larger cosmic ritual processes and transformations.

Before we examine the importance of ritual in Assyrian architecture, once again, it is first important to clarify our terminology. For us today, “ritual” means some regularized form of prescribed religious or solemn activity, reflecting a belief in some higher authority, often divine. Much like the term landscape, ritual is also historically constituted, belonging primarily to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bremmer 2004: 32). Modern scholars have devised numerous typologies of ritual action, but certain themes consistently emerge. According to Catherine Bell’s (1997: 108–109) generalized typological scheme, Assyrian building rituals would belong to the category of rites of “exchange and communion,” whereby offerings are made to satisfy the deity and to receive some form of divine favor in return. In such forms of ritual activity, prescribed actions are performed, and potent or sacred substances are often used in libations and sacrifice. As Bell (1997: 112) notes, such rituals may be done for a variety of reasons – including thanksgiving, the expiation of evils, and the placation of deities – but on some level they are all perceived to involve a cosmic union to renew the universe and to reorder the relations that sustain it. When there is an offering involved, there is typically a communal consumption of that substance after its use, thus further emphasizing the cosmic nature of the event. Modern scholars may view exchange and communion rituals with some skepticism, suspecting political manipulations in the process. All agree, however, that such rituals invoke complex relations between the human realm and the divine.

With this in mind, it is important to remember that although for us the term ritual is part of our regular vocabulary, in ancient Mesopotamia there was no such specific term, and instead, several different nouns were used, all related to the verbal form *epēšu*, meaning “to act” or “to make,” signaling that ritual was essentially instrumental in its aims (Ambos 2010a: 18). In ancient Mesopotamia, the techniques of ritual were believed to have been handed down to man from the divine realm, and to have been transmitted over the centuries from one period to the next, resulting in a relatively consistent ritual tradition over time. Throughout all periods, it was believed that the success of the ritual was wholly dependent upon the willingness of the gods themselves – which in turn depended upon human fulfillment of duty in relation to them, especially in the case of the king.

All kinds of Mesopotamian ritual actions are known, but here, we are concerned with those rituals related to the construction and occupation of buildings. Throughout Mesopotamian history, certain beliefs and actions persisted. Regarding the construction of a building, because it was believed that bad omens could occur at any stage, building rituals were performed regularly – not only for the successful completion of the building, but also for the well-being of the builder (Ambos 2010b: 222). Likewise, when a building was finished, it had to be ritually purified before the inhabitants could enter. Depending upon the type of building, different stages in a ritual process were performed, with offerings and incantations given to the gods, including the brick god Kulla and his divine architect-colleague Mušdama. These actions were performed by ritual experts – including the exorcist (*āšipu*), the lamentation-singer (*kalû*), musician (*nāru*), and diviner (*bārû*) – whose participation was considered as important as that of the architect, since they guaranteed the satisfaction and protection of the gods. Although relatively few rituals leave lasting material traces, the specifics of building rituals are nevertheless known from several sources: ritual handbooks, omen texts, royal inscriptions and images, and letters and reports by ritual experts to the king (Ambos 2004; Parpola 1983).

We know the most about rituals performed in the construction of temples, as these structures – home to the gods who protected the city and king – were considered central to the community's well being. As chief priest, the ruler was solely responsible for the repair and maintenance of existing temples and the construction of new ones. Damage to a temple was believed to have been caused by the anger of the resident god, who needed to be placated through appropriate rituals and rebuilding processes. One of the most important criteria in a temple was its continuity with the past. Therefore, if part or all of a temple needed to be rebuilt, the king took certain measures to assure this continuity, such as maintaining the original ground plan and/or retrieving and reusing the “first” or “former brick” (*libittu maḥritu*). Mesopotamian rulers often describe how they made this first brick – known from literary sources to have been laden with birth symbolism – and carried it to the site to initiate the building process (Ambos 2010b: 227–28).

Relatively speaking, we have less information on palace construction than we do for temple or house construction, but because of the strength and continuity of the religious tradition in Mesopotamia, we can infer that a number of those same rituals were also performed in the construction of the Assyrian palace. Although no ancient handbook of palace building rituals is known and no modern compilation of sources has yet been written, from just a brief look at the archaeological, textual, and visual evidence, an array of apotropaic and state ritual practices and other ceremonies becomes apparent. For example, at all of the major Assyrian capital cities figurines made of clay and auspicious materials have been found ritually deposited in boxes or jars in building foundations for protection against evil spirits and diseases. Ritual texts prescribe just how the figurines were to be inscribed, as well as their number and burial locations – mainly in the corners of rooms and in courtyards (Green 1983;

Wiggermann 1992). In a similar fashion, royal inscriptions were often ritually written onto, and/or deposited in, auspicious places in foundations or walls (Ellis 1968: 96–111). These very texts and others referring to them name the builder-king, the rituals that accompanied their deposition – including oil libations and sacrifice – and the benefits that the king will incur.

These texts – the very same texts that contain our landscape narratives – are associated with state-sponsored palaces, temples, and other large-scale construction works, mostly in the main Assyrian capital centers, but also at other significant sites. Depending upon the period, they were written on various stone surfaces of the building itself, including walls and floors, or on other surfaces placed in, attached to, or embedded in the structure, including areas not normally seen with human eyes (Russell 1999). As mentioned above, these texts are usually considered historical in content and ideological in aim. For our purposes in discussing architecture and ritual, however, they offer up two important strands of information: first, they document a host of palace rituals, and second, certain formal features highlight their probable function as ritual recipients and/or ritual tools. In this regard, they constitute an important manifestation of the complex endeavor of royal representation.

The Assyrian royal inscriptions document a number of types of state and other ritual actions, including those related to the construction of both temples and palaces – with accounts often overlapping in content and language (Lackenbacher 1990; Novotny 2010). From these texts we learn that similar to the case of temples, one of the king's ongoing responsibilities was the repair and rebuilding of abandoned palaces. In order to restore a former ruler's palace, the current king prepared the site by clearing away the old ruin hill, "delineated its area," and dug down to its bedrock foundation. As the new palace "full of splendor" took shape, the king wrote inscriptions all over its surfaces, and deposited more in the foundations, as described above. In the process, he also re-deposited the inscriptions of earlier kings, anointing them with oil, pouring out libations, and performing sacrifices. When a palace was completed, the gods were "invited inside" and rituals were performed, including the burning of incense and sacrifice. More public, commemorative banquets were then held, and foreign gift-bearing emissaries were received.

Monumental visual imagery – on palace walls, doorways, and freestanding obelisks – confirms some of these same ceremonial events recounted in texts, including banqueting and tribute processions (Reade 2005). Other images reveal otherwise unknown ritual details, such as those performed after the hunt (Watanabe 1992). These scenes remind us of the propitious nature of royal movements and actions, and contain concrete evidence for ritual furniture, personnel, and event sequencing. In a very different manner, more emblematic palace imagery incorporates abstract symbolism and otherworldly beings and thus may allude to or represent rituals more esoteric in nature (Brandes 1970; Brentjes 2001; Richardson 1999).

Taken together, the textual and visual evidence evokes a highly ritualized palace culture – one in which a multitude of such performances are documented and

remembered. More than simply describing rituals, however, the texts and images seem to have participated in them, as well – raising important questions about monument ontology and agency. For example, the above-mentioned foundation texts often contain a section that speaks directly to the person who will discover them. Here, ritual knowledge, however brief, is transmitted to the reader (a future king), who is asked to care for and ritually maintain the monument, and to return it to its proper abode. Ready and waiting for this ritual re-invigoration, the texts directly and consistently acknowledge the gods, thus ultimately functioning as a kind of conduit to the divine. Not only do these utterances praise the deities and give full credit to them for the king's accomplishments, but they also dedicate the building itself to them, as yet another of the king's completed royal tasks. In so doing, not only do the texts indicate causal relationships between the completion of the building process, the satisfaction of the deities, and the fate of the builder, but they also seal those relationships, and are a potent means to assure divine answers to the king's prayers and to lengthen his life and reign.

Of course, when dealing with matters concerning ancient ritual and the divine, not every aspect will be reflected in the material record. For example, surely these texts were recited, at least on occasion. One text indicates that the royal inscriptions were indeed performed by singers – that is, ritual experts – and thus opens up a much wider range of interpretive possibilities for us (Ambos 2004: 13, 75). Not only does this evidence reveal an actual dialogic relationship between text and reader, but it also renders what we might consider to be mundane acts of writing, recitation, and aural reception of texts as constitutive of ritual process. This scenario is further suggested by the sheer number of duplicate texts, and especially their formulaic nature. Usually deemed redundant, such repetitions instead appear essential if considered from the alternative perspective of sacred building practices. In other words, such duplication and repetition could have found resonance at any number of moments in the ongoing event of building construction and occupation. Perhaps, for example, each text is a trace of a ritual event, performed at a specific stage in the building process. Ultimately, the making, recitation, and reception of these texts – as an integral component in the buildings as a whole – were all surely considered important means by which the king's satisfaction of the deities was secured and strengthened.

The question remains, of course, how palace images might have functioned in this same ritual environment. Were they also traces of ritual moments? Did they also serve to convey ritual information, or further, serve as offerings to satisfy the gods for the well being of the king? It is surely possible. Our own modern visual tradition leads us to view the ancient images as autonomous surface representations, to be analyzed discretely in terms of their iconographic or formal properties. But our discussion of the palace texts begs the question: how might the images have engaged other, performative realms, as well?

As noted above, palace imagery certainly documents ritual activity – not only state ceremonies, but also more solemn activities incorporating traditional ritual

furniture, personnel, and actions. Whether and how the reliefs themselves would have been ritualized as agents or recipients, however, is not obvious, and must be fleshed out from a wider field of inquiry. In Mesopotamia we have ample evidence for the ritualization of cult images, as well as for images of the king. For example, the statues of the third millennium ruler Gudea of Lagash – himself an avid builder – appear to have been carefully crafted for their specific ritual tasks. As Irene Winter (1992) so astutely noted, these images – made in order to reside either in temple sanctuaries or in funerary chapels, were subject to complex “rituals of constitution” in order to render them effective in their communication with the divine, and quite literally, to bring them alive. From the Middle Assyrian period, Tukulti-Ninurta I’s cult pedestal – an object regularly used in ritual – was also eloquent in its form, depicting the king in the act of worship, perhaps in front of the actual pedestal itself. Although the nature and effect of such an event is open to question, as Zainab Bahrani (2003: 185–201) reminds us, the almost certain resonance of such a moment when the royal person’s actions are choreographed by his own image must have evoked an otherworldly aura. Likewise, from the late Assyrian period, we have several examples of royal statuary that appear to be good candidates for ritual action. A statue of Assurnasirpal II, discovered in the Šarrat-nip̄i Temple at Nimrud, depicts the king at attention in his priestly garb (RIMA 2: 305–306). Likewise, a statue of Shalmaneser III, whose inscription announces the statue’s dedication to the god Adad, was most certainly installed, and periodically re-invigorated, through ritual activity (RIMA 3: 58–61).

As for the ritualization of Neo-Assyrian palace images, we have no direct textual confirmation of this, as the kings themselves offer relatively scant information even about the production, installation, and reception of the reliefs. Nevertheless, some of the textual accounts written on the monuments do invoke the gods, and their recitation by professional singers would have brought the spaces of the palace to life (RIMA 3: 63–64). As for archaeological evidence, several intriguing scenarios have been reconstructed for Assurnasirpal II’s Northwest Palace East Suite, where niches, depressions, and drains placed in unique room layouts and among otherworldly imagery may have serviced rituals to commemorate and placate ancestral spirits (Russell 1998; Richardson 1999; Brown 2010). Likewise, other emblematic imagery, including the so-called “sacred tree” scene, might have referenced specific ritual paraphernalia and actions in the royal court (Magen 1986; Giovino 2007; Ataç 2010a).

As for whether the narrative images themselves directly depict their own ritualization, however, the answer is “no.” From the Temple of Mamu at the cultic site of Imgur-Enlil, however, we do have examples of an Assyrian practice of representing the ritualization of a royal image – the only such examples of their kind. In particular, three scenes from the bronze gate bands of Shalmaneser III describe how images – in this case, royal stelae and/or rock reliefs in outlying regions – functioned as ritual implements and/or destinations. The monuments depicted on the bronze bands belonged to a much larger corpus of landscape monuments, approximately fifty of

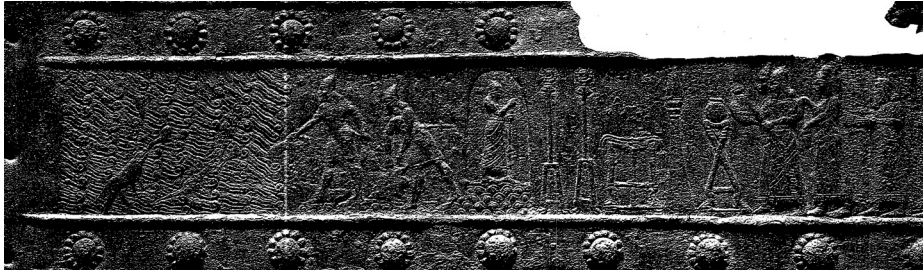


Figure 1: Balawat Gates of Shalmaneser III, Band I. King 1915: pl. I; by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

which have survived, with nearly as many more mentioned in royal inscriptions. These were found throughout the Assyrian peripheries, and appear to have been erected to commemorate significant places and moments in any given king's reign (Shafer 1998). From visual and textual references we know that these monuments were ritualized and were highly charged sites of Assyrian identity and presence.

These Balawat scenes are important because they give us a wealth of information about such image ritualizations, which in texts are only briefly referenced. In each of these scenes a single image of the king stands at the culmination of a ritual procession. In the first narrative sequence on Band I, several moments appear to be combined in one long scene depicting Shalmaneser's monument at the Nairi Sea (Fig. 1). To begin, the Assyrian royal escort makes its way through difficult mountainous terrain to form a ritual procession; then, the procession has formed and animals are brought for sacrifice; and finally, the king, surrounded by priests, musicians, and ritual paraphernalia performs a libation in front of his own image carved in the rock. At the same time, the king's soldiers throw an animal offering to the sea (King 1915: pls. I–IV). In a similar fashion, although broken, Band N depicts a scene of ritual activity near a royal monument, this time located in the Amanus mountains. Next to the monument stand two royal standards and an incense burner, and three Assyrian officials with their hands folded in a gesture of respect (Unger 1920: pl. 1). Our final scene in Band X is a complex one, depicting not only the display, but also the carving of images and inscriptions at the so-called “source of the Tigris River,” a site that has been positively identified in southeastern Turkey (King 1915: pls. LVII–LIX). Here in both the upper and lower registers are scenes of a royal military procession, first approaching, and then departing from a scene of animal sacrifice near the royal images. Certain scenes are omitted here: the actual moment when the king appears before his own image, as well as the weapon-washing and feasting mentioned in textual accounts of the event. Instead, the image gives us details not otherwise seen elsewhere – including information on craftsmen and the image-making process – and thus reminds us to imagine ritual events as comprehensive in scope and experience.

The exact nature and goals of these depicted rituals are not entirely clear. We do not know, for example, whether the images themselves were being installed or activated in some way, or whether they were simply witnessing a ritual performed for some other purpose, such as for the completion of the campaign. We do know, however, that the monuments themselves were believed to be direct mechanisms for communicating with the divine, and that their proper ritualization carried consequences. On one such surviving example – the so-called “Cyprus stela” of Sargon II – the inscription says that the king put “[symbols] of the great gods” on the stela itself and set it up “before them” (the gods) “for [his] life” (Luckenbill 1926–27: vol. II, 103). As for details about rituals, several of the surviving monuments have inscriptions describing their own ritualization, and thus, like the foundation deposits in the palace, offer a “future ruler” important instructions to protect him from harm. Here, the goals are clearly stated: to understand the monument content (“to read” it), to perform the proper rituals (“to wash it with water,” “to anoint it with oil,” and “to make sacrifices”), and to invoke (“praise the name of”) the gods. Other ritual details are known from references to such monuments in palace texts, and while those accounts are brief, they mention rituals of weapon-washing (*kakki aššur ūlil*), sacrifices to the gods (UDU.SISKUR.MEŠ *ana* DINGER.MEŠ), and ritual feasts (*naptānu*). Moreover, at least nine similar examples are known to have been erected in temple contexts, and although there are no descriptions of the attendant rituals, their inscriptions carry praises of the gods. Ultimately, such an offering was intended to bring favorable consequences to the king, and by extension, to the land of Assyria.

Sacred Landscape as Ritual Process

In addition to giving us specific information about ritual processes, the Balawat scenes also potentially revolutionize our understanding of palace images – specifically how they might have functioned as royal agents in larger cosmic processes played out on, and in reference to, the landscape itself. Fundamentally, they remind us that the boundaries of the universe, “the four quarters,” were defined in terms of landscape features, and that reaching them, and then marking and commemorating that process was essential to the making of a king. This is shown by the overall visual program of the gates, which not only appears to have organized the narratives into discreet sequences, but also to have highlighted the ritual ends of the universe, marked by royal monuments (Marcus 1987; Hertel 2004; Schachner 2007). These sequences parallel motifs in the royal epithets and conquest summaries, which, in ancient Mesopotamian fashion, repeatedly claim that the “king[s] of the universe” controlled the legendary ends of the world – the names for which changed, but which belonged to a cosmos anchored by mountains and especially waters (Cifola 1995). As we begin to realize this, the king’s movements through the landscape no longer appear motivated simply by a bloody thirst for power, or even by economic gain.

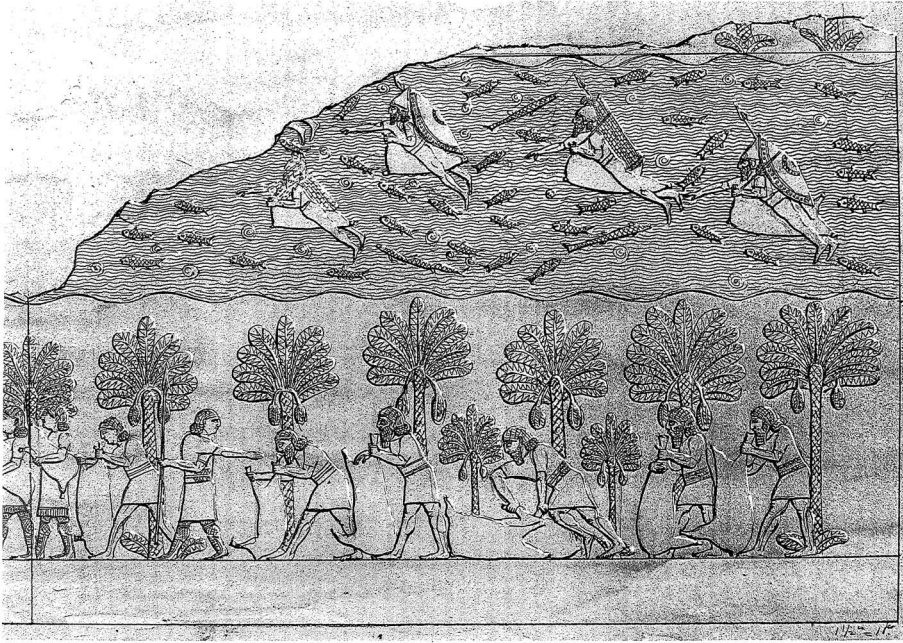


Figure 2: Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Court XIX. Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: pl. 192; by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Instead, the king appears to be called forth by the landscape and engages it because it is his cosmic role to do so. And the trip is difficult. Royal accounts present the long and arduous journeying to these places as a testament to the king's force of will. Rivers must be crossed (Fig. 2), and difficult mountain passes must be scaled. Moreover, the land contains enemies, who also challenge Assyrian determination and resolve. Indeed, the very phenomenon of the military campaign itself was inextricably linked to this goal. To cross mountains as "jagged as the point of a dagger" is one thing, but to fight in them (Fig. 3) requires nothing less than the king's deep "yearning" for battle, and dying that same mountain landscape "red like red wool" with the enemy's blood is the ultimate "thundering" blow (Fig. 4).

Although scholarship may continue to view Assyrian royal narratives as symbolic statements motivated by political power, to reframe them as real journeys to ritual sites at the edges of the world opens new doors to undetected realities. For example, we might see greater sincerity in the king's claim to a divine role in his military movements and successes, as Assur "called [him] by name" and "placed his merciless weapon in [his] lordly arms." Likewise, we might assign new significance to the various phenomena of war, such as the collection of tribute in the form of agricultural produce and manufactured goods. While this wealth certainly serviced the Assyrian center's economic and ideological-political needs, it might have also belonged to

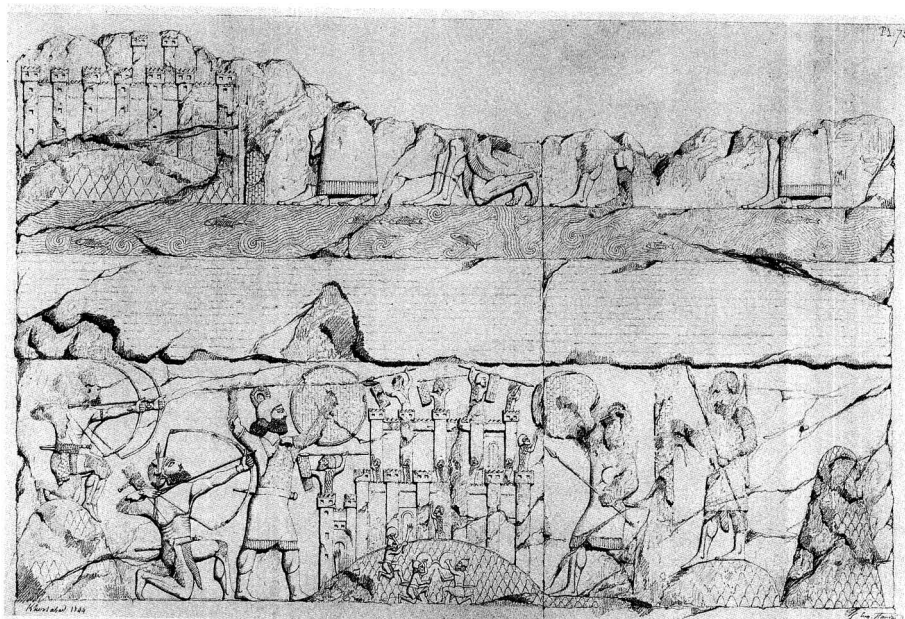


Figure 3: Khorsabad (Dur-Sharrukin), Room 2. Botta and Flandin 1849–1850: vol. I, pl. 70.

other agendas, including the full-circle return of the fruits of war to the gods. This is suggested, for example, by the water landscapes depicting the transport of Lebanese timbers (Fig. 5). Taken specifically for use as roofing and doorposts in temples – as well as in palaces – cedar was prized not only for its perfume, but also for its having been taken from the edge of the world. Likewise, in inscriptions kings make specific note of the limestone and alabaster used for walls and doorway figures, and the “greenish” and “lapis” glazes on bricks – all of which resulted from control of the land, and which most certainly had magical, if not cosmic associations (RIMA 2: 289). Quite literally, then, even the exotic materials used to build and adorn monumental architecture were collected, transported, and fashioned as fulfillment of the requirements of a cosmic process.

In a similar fashion, when the hunt is reframed as a journey through the landscape of the four quarters, we notice also that it was divinely ordered and miraculously accomplished (Fig. 6). For example, Assurbanipal claims, “Nergal, who goes before, caused me to undertake every (form) of hunting on the plain... In an open space in the plain, fierce lions, dreadful creatures of the mountains, came out. They surrounded the chariot, my royal vehicle. At the command of Assur and Ishtar, the great gods, my lords... I shattered the might of those lions” (Luckenbill 1926–27 vol. II, 392). Especially pertinent to this discussion, as well, is what the hunt’s very presence reminds us: that scholarly perceptions of royal visual narratives in terms of distinct iconographic types – as scenes of battle, the hunt, tribute procession, etc. – might fail

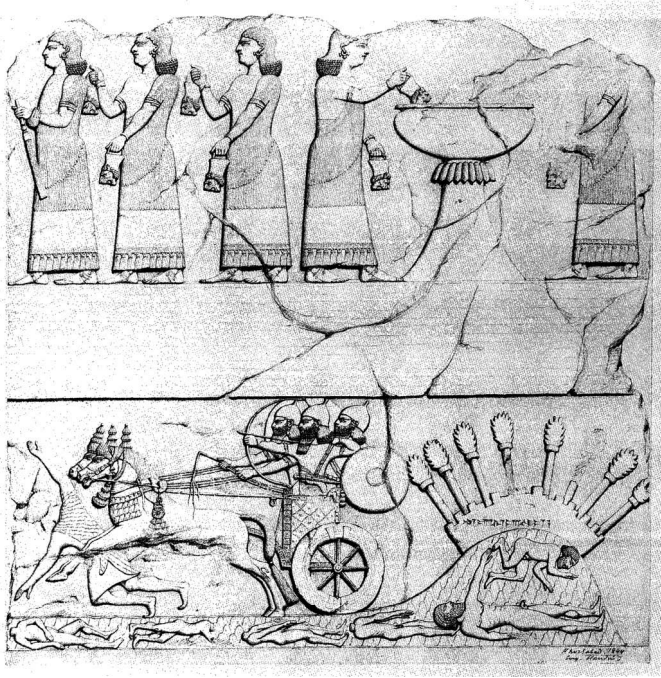


Figure 4: Khorsabad (Dur-Sharrukin), Room 2. Botta and Flandin 1849–1850: vol. I, pl. 76.

to grapple with their presence *together* in palace iconographical schemes. To see them instead as various technologies of one, unifying journey through mountains and waters to the ends of the universe is to finally begin to understand the multitude of alternative ways that ancient images encompassed the actions represented in them.

In addition to providing us with the interpretive framework of the cosmic journey, the Balawat scenes also open onto a second interpretive trajectory: that the experience and intention of these ancient images was, on a number of levels, phenomenal. For one, the monuments engaged a host of concrete experiences and sensations. Not only was getting to the site and carving the monuments physically demanding, but the rituals performed at the monument sites generated a rich engagement of the senses as well. Musical instruments, recitation, incense, and animal sacrifice most certainly produced an aural and olfactory feast, all set within a foreign setting where the smell of pines and the sound of rushing water had an effect of their own.

In such a place at such a moment alternative perceptions, temporalities, and phenomenal levels were most certainly activated, as for example, the connection to ancestral presences. That is, a remarkable number of these monuments – including all three depicted at Balawat – appear to have been ritual additions to sites already marked on previous campaigns. Indeed, in the constant process of territorial consolidation, royal itineraries often retraced the routes of former monument-carving kings.

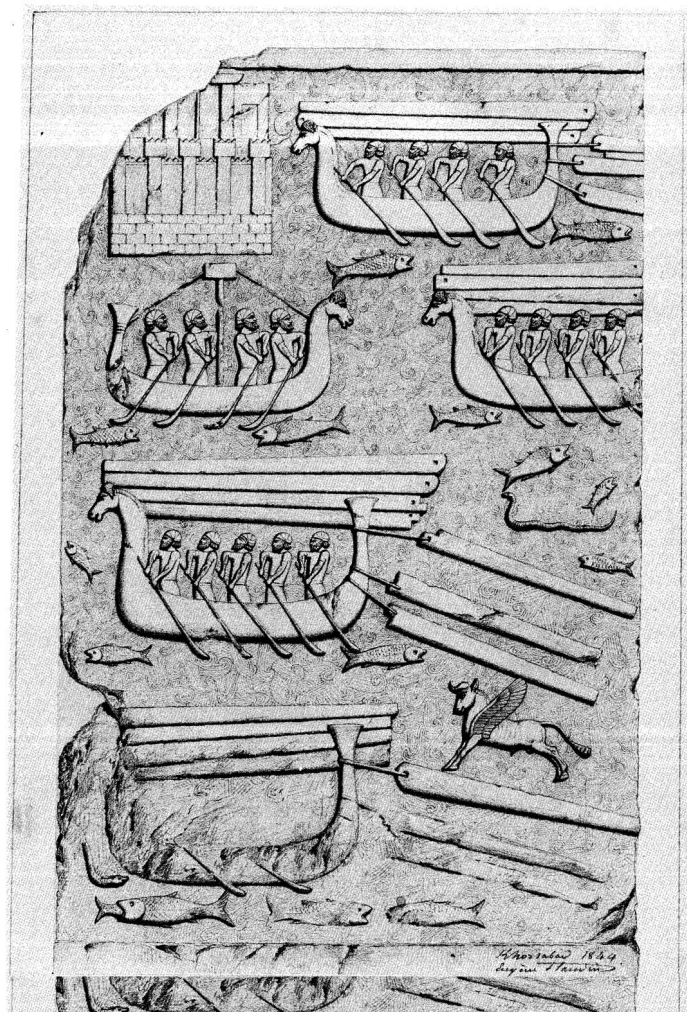


Figure 5: Khorsabad (Dur-Sharrukin), Façade n. Botta and Flandin 1849–1850: vol. I, pl. 33.

We know that such ancestral monuments were so deliberately sought as pilgrimage-sites that they must have structured, on some level, the itineraries themselves. At the places where cosmic waters rush forth, or where the ancient cedars grow, one's actions are not one's own, but are re-enactments of ancient processes and dynamics, and may, quite literally, call forth the ancestral presences themselves. Along with other images carved at important sites along the way, these sites would have constituted a chain of solemn ritual moments, sacralizing the landscape (Shafer 2007).

Pushing this notion of the ancestral further into another level of the phenomenal experience, it might be said that the royal movements were not about possession of

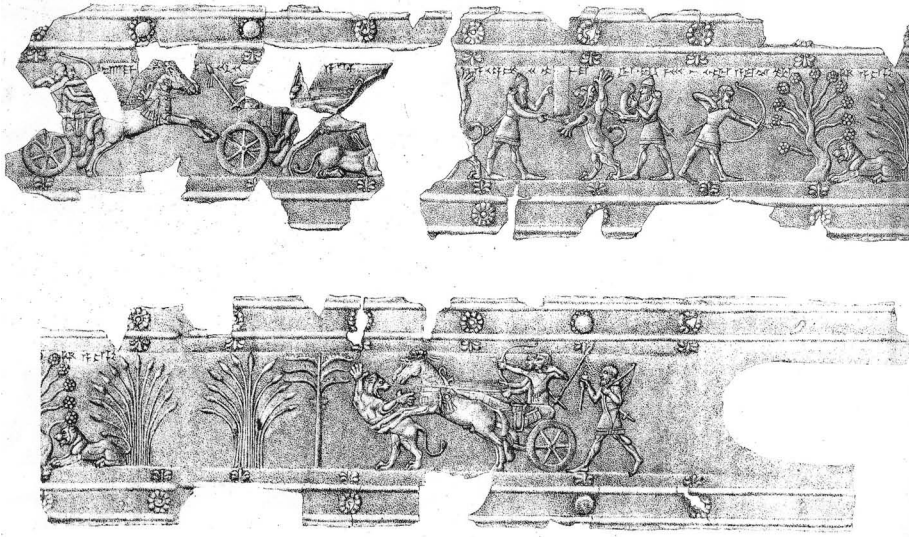


Figure 6: Balawat Gates of Assurnasirpal II, Band R5. Barnett 2008: fig. 32; by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

landscape, but about its concretization. That is, these journeys and the resulting landscape monuments could well have been considered fully performative, as constructing, quite literally, a cosmic architecture (Shafer forthcoming a). Fundamental to this idea of performance is the anthropological notion of object agency, which replaces the semiological understanding of objects and their ornamentation as symbolic of something else, with an understanding of them as agents in and of themselves (Gell 1998). In this framework, our monuments would have performed as ritual-spatial phenomena, and thus for example, as important sites of identity construction. Taking this one step further, however, more recent “cognitive” frameworks of analysis allow for these monuments to have done much more than just express and maintain social forms. Rather, they may have constituted literal extensions of the royal mind and body, thus fully active in their ability to generate relations and phenomena that the king’s very person might have enacted (Malafouris and Renfrew 2010). As mentioned above, in ancient Mesopotamia we do indeed have evidence that royal statue inscriptions not only carried messages to the gods, but that they were themselves brought to life to act in the king’s stead. As such, when carved and perhaps brought into being through ritual, these Assyrian landscape monuments would have been more than just boundary markers, but rather, would have stood quite literally as what Zainab Bahrani (2003: 123) refers to as “natural representations” – images that occupied the same ontological plane as the man himself. As monuments produced by divine mandate, ritualized, and present in the land long after the king’s departure, they would have thus sacralized the landscape in a permanent way, as well as the king’s

person in relation to it. Said another way, the king – himself quite literally carved into the land – may not have been considered fully constituted as ruler until his own tracing of a cosmos – through the images – was complete.

With the ritual-phenomenal ontology of the king's landscape movements and monuments in mind, the Balawat scenes now appear as key – even pivotal – images in the reframing of the issue of landscape and thus also the palace phenomenon of landscape imagery in its entirety. These scenes survive on a temple doorway – a highly charged place of transition into the sacred, where resonances run deep and hidden from the mundane view. As such, they constitute what Davide Nadali (forthcoming) calls a “metapicture” of ritual itself – an image in a ritual context that is about the very act of ritualizing images. When we consider these associations, our perceptions about the essential purpose of the Assyrian palaces and their landscape imagery might begin to transform. No longer do we need to read the palace message as king-conquering-enemies, but rather, as cosmic topographies transforming – in a sense conquering – him. Treacherous mountainsides present very real challenges to his might and resolve, yet also open ancestral pathways to welcome him. Exotic resources and knowledge of the earth's extremities accompany him home, and continue to translate into divine favor long after his return. Moreover, distributed, ritually charged sites – not always depicted, but as we know, fully present in reality – anchor this land as cosmically sound. The depicted landscape, then, is much more than a militarized one. Rather, fundamentally, it is a sacred one. In such a reality the landscape is not an entity that the king manipulates and controls victorious, but rather, is one that continuously provides riches and calls forth future traveler-kings to its challenges, including its renderings in monumental textual and visual form.

With this fundamental interpretive shift come further possible ritual associations of the palace landscape images, as well. For example, we might now posit an analogy between palace images and palace texts, which speak, and quite literally serve as ritual agents, conveying instructions, and offering up accounts of the king's journeys to the divine. Building on this, we might begin to think of the royal landscape journeys and their representations as analogous to, or even part of, larger ritual actions or cycles. For example, in many ways the landscape narratives recall what Mary Helms (1988) has documented in traditional societies as rituals of “long-distance knowledge-gathering.” In this process, long-distance “specialists” journey forth in ritual fashion into exotic lands to collect secret knowledge and substances. On these voyages the specialists travel across ancestral pathways to the sacred points of the universe, and in the process, encounter strange peoples and customs, as well as traditional knowledge. Once the traveler returns, the results of such ventures – goods and insights – belong to a corpus of esoterica, which he must protect and maintain. Although a leader by nature and fated for this role, the traveler must nevertheless work to achieve this status and must often renew his commitment to it.

In many ways, such a journeying is akin to what Victor Turner (1969) popularized as the “liminal” stage in a three-part ritual process that includes rites of separation

from society, rites of a liminal or marginal state, and rites of return. As what is more broadly categorized as a “rite of passage,” this process is undertaken on a small scale by most members in society as part of their transitions through the stages of life. For special individuals such as leaders, however, the stages are more pronounced and are formalized into personal and collective ritual. Indeed, evidence reveals that Assyrian kings also participated formally in rites of passage, including liminal states, as for example, in the ritual *bīt rimki*, which was enacted within the framework of the “ritual of the substitute king,” itself performed in the event of an inauspicious solar or lunar eclipse (Ambos 2013). In this process, the king literally moved place, faced difficult challenges alone, and then performed purifying rituals in order to restore his strength and abilities for return. Moreover, such liminal states were probably also part of the king’s reality in other ways. For example, in Turner’s scheme – discerned from ethnographic research, but also applicable to societies of antiquity – war and the experience of battle also qualifies as a liminal state. Likewise, the Assyrian annual campaign surely encompassed this rite, challenging and affirming the king’s ability to conform to proper behavior, and on many levels, to exhibit strength and skill as a leader (Talon 2005: 105, 116).

While the journeying or liminal phase is the heart of the ritual process or its determining phase, however, equally charged is the traveler’s return and re-integration into society. At this stage, his acquired knowledge and resources are transferred to others and are put to use, and the ritual process is complete. Often the transfer of such knowledge finds form in the material record. In Assyria, monumental texts and images tell us that one ritual to mark the king’s successful long-distance return was to construct another type of landscape – elaborate royal gardens with exotic species beyond imagine (Fig. 7). Often interpreted as symbolic constructions for the indulgence of the victorious king, these remarkable places are now being re-defined by archaeological evidence as having involved extensive irrigation projects, and thus as having brought, quite practically speaking, agricultural lands to fruition (Radner 2000: 239; Bagg 2000). In this regard, horticultural experts and hydraulic engineers were most certainly among those waiting to benefit from the king’s knowledge upon return. That the transference of this and other valuable “long-distance knowledge” was expected of the king is shown, for example, in the text on Assurnasirpal II’s Great Monolith, a stele carved to resemble a landscape monument, but discovered in a ritual context in his capital at Nimrud. Here, following a detailed narrative of the king’s first five landscape-campaigns, a curse section protects the monument for the benefit of “palace scholars” (RIMA 2: 253). As we might imagine, this text and others like it – although usually interpreted as fairly standard in content – could have been coded with arcane knowledge for specialized use.

Likewise, such scholarly wisdom must have been embedded in and conveyed through palace imagery as well. Just what constituted the details of the king’s acquired knowledge, however, is secret, of course. Beyond news of foreign peoples and places, certainly it encompassed traditions or practices that, when rendered in

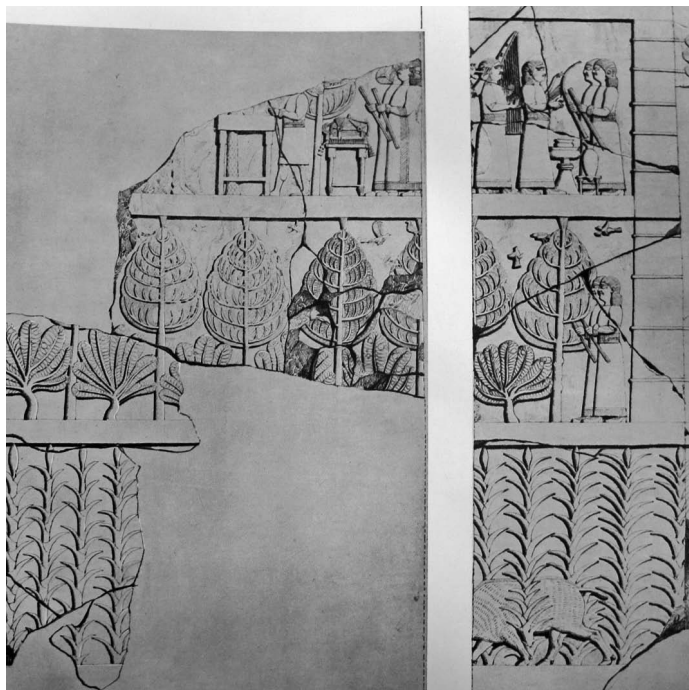


Figure 7: Nineveh, North Palace Room S1. Barnett 1976: pl. LXIII; by permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

monumental form, were not obvious to the uninitiated – ourselves included. Such esoteric knowledge might have been rendered as iconographical elements and/or visual patterns, for example, as explored in Mehmet-Ali Ataç’s (2010b) analysis of Assurnasirpal II’s palace imagery. Moreover, the methods of communicating this information might have belonged to cognitive realms beyond our Cartesian reasoning. Davide Nadali (2012), for example, approaches this question in his deployment of recent scientific studies of “mirror neurons” in the brain to posit that the images induced, quite literally, a secondhand experience of the events depicted. Indeed, within this cognitive paradigm, certain formal features such as repetition and non-specificity – both characteristic features of the Assyrian landscape imagery in both text and image – are believed to have been “thought-enabling elements” in what Andy Clark (2010) calls a “surrogate” experience of the otherworldly. Certainly, there is much to be done in the investigation of ancient image reception and the possible role of esoteric knowledge. From our position at this time, however, it is difficult to imagine fully the nature of the knowledge and the complexity of its transfer.

While the dissemination of specialist knowledge would have been one of the most important *results* of the king’s landscape travels, in conclusion, I must say that for the

future, my ultimate focus lies elsewhere. Rather, I am interested in what the landscape images must have *embodied*. That is, in the larger sense of ritual, if the king's landscape travel constituted liminality, then certainly the resulting depictions of such travel must have served as the final step in this process: the king's re-integration. The carving of monumental textual and visual landscapes, in other words, was not only celebratory of cosmic balance, but must have been *required* to complete it. Much like the battle in the mountain, the hunt in the plain, and the transport of timbers over deep waters, the making of images to somehow capture that experience was a ritual action, whose authenticity had far-reaching implications – for the king and far beyond the palace sphere. If indeed the landscape was a ritualized one – a sacred one, in the fullest sense of the word – then the ultimate witness and arbiter of success would have been the gods.

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Aesthetics of the Natural Environment in the Arts of the Ancient Near East: The Elamite Rock-Cut Sanctuary of Kurangun

Abstract: A little-studied aspect of the range of meanings assigned to ancient Near Eastern art concerns the association between artistic manufacture and the natural environment. In this essay I analyze the Elamite open-air sanctuary of Kurangun to suggest that this association takes place at the aesthetic level. The sanctuary was carved 80 m high on a rock-cliff overlooking the Fahliyān River as it flows through the panoramic Mamasani region of southwestern Fārs, Iran. It was originally created around 1650 BCE, with subsequent additions made during the Neo-Elamite period (ca. 1000–525 BCE). In general terms, allocating aesthetic agency to the natural environment means that localized landscape features such as caves, rivers, hot springs, trees, rocks, lakes, or mountains could be the source of affective qualities that engage the senses, the attention, and the intellect, and that are bound in time and space to specific cultural sensibilities and thus can be foundations for, and key determinants of, concentrated artistic endeavour. In particular, this essay seeks to provide key theoretical foundations to argue in favor of the participatory role that aesthetics of the natural environment play in the creation of Elamite art. The idea that the sanctuary of Kurangun was conceived of and materialized as the artistic expression of such an undertaking is further explained in terms of belief-systems that perceived the natural environment as the active medium in which life and human creativity integrated and came to identity.

Keywords: Elam, Kurangun, aesthetics, nature, natural environment, landscape

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Introduction: The Role of Nature in Ancient Near Eastern Art

Most people are on the world, not in it – have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them – undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished stone, touching but separate (Muir 1938)¹

The field of Near Eastern art history has developed in tandem with the ability to compare elements in visual media with archaeological and textual information. As result, the interpretative boundaries have expanded and increased attention has been given to the organic nature of the artifact, that is, the inseparable universe of meanings involving the economic, religious, political, social, and aesthetic aspects of an artwork.² Within this broad universe a little-studied aspect of an artwork's significance concerns its association with the natural environment. In this essay I analyze the Elamite open-air highland sanctuary of Kurangun to argue that this association takes place at the aesthetic level. Broadly speaking, this means that both the natural environment and localized natural features such as caves, rivers, springs, trees, rocks, lakes, or mountains, can be the source of emotional qualities involving the senses *and* the intellect, are bound in time and space to specific cultural sensibilities and thus can be foundational for, and key determinants of, concentrated artistic endeavour. Hence, the term *aesthetics* is understood here to incorporate *both* manifestations of feelings or emotion *and* ideas or understandings generated by the senses as result of interaction with the natural environment. Such assertions have substantial theoretical implications with regard to standard definitions of aesthetics and the allocation of aesthetic agency to nature that cannot be ignored and that therefore are discussed in detail after analysis and interpretation of Kurangun.

In recent years a body of scholarship has developed centering on the evaluation of landscapes and natural landmarks as “places which exist regardless of human agency but have acquired significance out of their association with powerful religious, aesthetic, or other cultural meanings” (Knapp and Ashmore 1999: 11).³ Within the

1 This essay is dedicated to my father Manuel Álvarez-Mon, *el viejo acampador*, who taught me the love of nature.

2 For general comments on Near Eastern art see Winter 2010; for the validity of western art historical discourse to represent non-western artistic production see Belting 2003: 7.

3 In this work the terms natural *landscape* and natural *environment* are used interchangeably regardless of whether the natural environment has been transformed through human agency (and become a cultural environment). For definitions of landscape see Anschuetz *et al.* 2001. For definitions of the cultural and natural heritages see UNESCO's 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*; articles 1 and 2. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>. For the direct link between the globalization of urban habitat and the accelerating destruction of nature that have accompanied the phenomenon of industrialization and the increased levels of attention given to the active participation of the natural environment on determining culture see Sherratt 1996: 14; Derks

field of landscape archeology, emphasis has been placed on the role that perception plays in recovering vanished ways of living in and experiencing the natural landscape by means of cultural or symbolic aspects of space and attachment to place (Tilley 1994: 73; Ashmore and Knapp 1999).⁴ The main premise behind this cognitive-oriented model posits that human experiences of the natural landscape cross over historical and cultural boundaries and therefore are retrievable (Renfrew 1994).⁵ A similar interest in the role of perception has driven the field of philosophy of the natural environment to focus on aesthetics.⁶ This relationship is canvassed in terms of contrasting phenomenological views allocated to the experiences of landscape (defined as a portion of the world out-there) and the natural *environment* defined as being part of a surrounding world determined by “...highly situated and multi-sensuous perspective(s)” (Brady 2003: 69).

In the field of ancient Near Eastern art examination and recognition of interactions between art and the natural environment is a relatively recent development still lacking theoretical and methodological foundations.⁷ In the following study, I seek to fill this void by arguing that artistic manufacture and the aesthetics of the natural environment form closely knitted associations functioning as intermediaries between culture and nature. I draw upon the work of the influential Classical art historian Vincent Scully, who chastised critics for ignoring and denying “any intended relationship between temples and landscape.” According to Scully, two major impediments stood in the way of a better understanding of Greek monumental sacred architecture and its relationship to the larger natural environment: first, the lack of primary involvement with the place where the sanctuaries were located; and second, the secularization of the natural landscape that began with modernity (Scully 1962: 3).⁸

Scully’s remarks resonate with force in regions comparable to Greek physical environments. For instance, outside the Elamite Zagros highlands, some of the best examples of the relationship between landscape and artistic manufacture known to me are found in Hittite Anatolia where natural landmarks such as mountains, rivers, caves

1997: 127; Anschuetz *et al.* 2001: 158. According to Knapp and Ashmore (1999: 2): “What was once theorized as a passive backdrop or forcible determinant of culture is now seen as an active and far more complex entity in relation to human lives”; for example: Buddhist tradition (Barnes 1999); Mayan tradition (Brady and Ashmore 1999); Inca tradition (van de Guchte 1999); Iberian peninsula (Bradley and Fábregas 1998); the Saami from Scandinavia (Bradley 2000).

⁴ For landscape archaeology, see Ucko and Layton 1999; Anschuetz *et al.* 2001.

⁵ See Bradley 2000 and responses by Johnston 1998; and Fleming 2006. For recent discussion on Near Eastern landscapes, see Steadman 2005; for the relation between perception and landscape, see Johnston 1998; for emotional intelligence, aesthetics and archaeology, see Gosden 2001, 2004.

⁶ Thus Hepburn 1966, 2002; Kemal and Gaskell 1993; Berleant and Carlson 1998; Brady 2003; Carlson 2002, 2009; Berleant 2004, 2005.

⁷ Generally, see Milano *et al.* 2000; and review by Smith 2001; see also the work of Kantor and Winter discussed below.

⁸ See Edlund 1987; Alcock and Osborne 1994; for Roman Gaul, see Derks 1997.

and springs provided the stage for sanctuaries and carved reliefs (Beckman 2004: 263; Ullmann 2010). This bond between art and nature may be said to be less apparent in regions lacking the conspicuous presence of natural landmarks such as the flat alluvial lowland plain of ancient Mesopotamia. In fact, there is no concrete evidence suggesting that individual trees, rocks, rivers, or lakes played obvious cultic roles in the relative densely urbanized landscape of lower Mesopotamia (Van De Mieroop 1997: 215). At the same time, the long historical sequence of landscape alteration affecting the lowland invites a nuanced approach to the archaeological record.⁹

Based on these general observations, and without implying geographic determinism, it is reasonable to consider that appropriate criteria for analysis and evaluation of the artistic record should reflect a distinction between the highlands and the lowlands. Hence, I would like to begin this study by proposing two general categories of appraisal based on whether the natural landscape was itself represented (*Landscape into Art*) or, conversely, whether it provided the setting for the representation of art (*Art into Landscape*).

Landscape into Art (or Natural Landscape as Representation)

In 1966 Helene Kantor examined the evolution of landscape representation during the Akkadian period and concluded that for the first time in the arts of Mesopotamia landscape emerged as an independent feature represented for its own sake (Kantor 1966: 145; followed by Spycket 1995: 2584). This was interpreted as an indication of a change in the experiential sensibility of the Akkadians or, as Kantor put it, the “Akkadian deep feeling for nature.” This change was perceived to relate to political and military expansionistic policies that exposed the lowland Akkadians to the landscape of the Zagros highlands: the homelands of the Lullu(bum), Gutu, Awanites, and Elamites (Kantor 1966: 152). These policies may also have been partially responsible for Naram-Sîn’s naming a year in which he reached the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (see below).

Further artistic analysis of the Akkadian interaction with the natural landscape of the highlands was pursued by Irene Winter in insightful studies of the stele of Naram-Sîn (Winter 1999, 2000). This interaction is marked by an ideological mental-map

⁹ For instance, the town of Eridu (Abu Shahrein) was founded atop a hilly outcrop located on a depression about 6.1 meters below the level of the surrounding land, which allowed the subterranean water table to collect together forming a sizeable (fresh water) lagoon. This lagoon came to be associated with the AB.ZU (Akkadian *apsû*), the underground freshwater ocean lying beneath the earth and part of every temple. Atop the protruding hill dominating the plain stood the temple of Enki known as the *E-abzu* (Leick 2001: 2–3 with refs.). See note 14.

distinguishing between the “in-here” flat landscape of the alluvial plain and the “out-there” mountainous landscape of the highlands. The “in-here” refers to the cultivated landscape within the boundaries of the Akkadian state and includes “domesticated landscape” properly managed by the socio-political system (including fields and gardens) and “symbolic landscapes.” The “out-there” landscape refers to the zone outside the state’s boundaries proper but “exploited by the state through hunting and gathering.”¹⁰ As an expression of “what is out there,” the stele of Naram-Sîn incorporates the presence of a generic mountain and two sinuous trees (one below the other), which Winter has indicated could be identified as oaks native to the Zagros Mountains. In addition, she points out the unusual pinkish limestone of the stele, which may be a reference to the landscape in the very area where the military campaign took place (Winter 1999: 120–23).

In the stele of Naram-Sîn the representation of an alien “out-there” natural environment associated with the Zagros highlands (mountain, oak-tree, rock and vertical perspective) suggests a deliberate attempt at addressing a lowland audience. Here the landscape of the highlands is twice “captured” by means of representation of natural markers (mountain/tree/rock) and victory/conquest of the highlanders; but also, in a very tangible and direct manner, through physical transformation and appropriation of the pinkish limestone from the “out-there” into a carved expression of cultural supremacy. In this sense, the natural landscape exhibited in the stele can be said to have been *construed* to intentionally play a *background role* to human activity. At the same time, the prominence of the vertical perspective and the colour of the stone are suggestive of attempts to provide a *sentiment du paysage*, a feeling for the highlands (Pézard and Pottier 1913: 34).

Art in Landscape (or Natural Landscape as Setting)

The so-called “source” of the Tigris River or “Tigris Tunnel” refers to the unusual natural topography of the Birkleyn caves and associated tunnel from which emerges a tributary of the Tigris River.¹¹ This is a remote location that judging by textual and artistic evidence was of great significance for Mesopotamian and Assyrian rulers. A number of expeditions to “the source” of the Tigris are known to have taken place during the time of Naram-Sîn of Akkad (2254–2218 BCE), Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 BCE), and Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE).¹²

¹⁰ For closely related carved reliefs, see Postgate and Roaf 1997: 152. For more on the representation and conceptualization of landscapes within narratives, see Wiggermann 1996; Álvarez-Mon 2004.

¹¹ Located 25 km north of the town of Lyce, in the Diyarbakir province (Turkey); Lat. 38°31'46.04"N; Long. 40°32'59.19"E

¹² Naram-Sîn named a year after an expedition to the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates and was victorious against Shenaminda; CDLI: <http://cdli.ucla.edu/tools/yeardnames/HTML/T2K3.htm> (ac-

The Assyrian rulers commemorated their presence at the source of the Tigris with relief carvings and complementary royal inscriptions. Shalmaneser III was most keen on immortalizing such accomplishments: in addition to having carved *in situ* four similar inscriptions and two reliefs he had a visual record of this visit replicated on bronze bands decorating a monumental gate found at Imgur-Enlil (Tell Balawat) and left a textual account of the expedition in the Black Obelisk erected at Nimrud.¹³ According to this document:

In my seventh regnal year... I went as far as to the source of the Tigris (*rēš idēni ša idIdiqlat*), the place where the water comes out. I washed the weapon of Aššur therein, made sacrifices to my gods, (and) put on a celebration banquet. I fashioned a splendid royal image of myself (*salam šarrūtiya*), inscribed thereon the praise of Aššur, my lord, (and) all the heroic deeds which I achieved in the lands, (and) set (it) up therein. [Face D, 69–72; RIMA 3: 65]

The unique overlap of visual and textual evidence provided by Shalmaneser III offers multiple perspectives on which to evaluate the significance of these expeditions to “the place where the water comes out.”¹⁴ From the viewpoint of human agency, one can discern politico-military outlooks where reaching “the source” of the Tigris River (the “blood-artery” of the Assyrian heartland) marked a highpoint in the royal ideology of heroic conquest. At the same time, the “visibility” of the act was materialized through the carving of a “splendid royal image,” thus establishing a permanent visual record of the king’s presence. Further, by means of “washing the weapons of Assur,” “sacrificing to the gods,” and “setting a banquet” the king ritualized the space of the Birkleyn caves and transformed what was essentially natural space into a cultural place/event space of transcendental and numinous religious proportions.

The significance of these events becomes fully apparent when incorporating the exceptional characteristics of the natural landscape of the Birkleyn caves into the interpretative equation. In other words, the caves, tunnel and river and surrounding landscape were conceptualized as the “place where the water comes out.” This place was of monumental ideological significance and became the stage onto which political and religious ideology were articulated in parallel with corresponding artistic

cessed 29-11-2010; RIME 2: 86); see also a related inscriptions from Nineveh (Gelb and Kienast 1990: 5–14; NSin 2, 90, II. 56–60; RIMA 2: 61).

13 For a detail account see Schachner 2004; for interpretations see Kreppner 2002 and Harmanşah 2007; see also Shafer 1998; for Hittite parallels see Hawkins 1998.

14 According to Black and Green (1992: 27), “it was anciently believed that springs, wells, streams, rivers, and lakes drew their water from and were replenished from a freshwater ocean which lay beneath the earth in the *abzu/apsū* or *engur*. The belief that fresh “water flowing in streams from the mountains to the seas must then ascend through underground channels (or some other internal system) to the tops of mountains” remained unchanged until the 17th century (Gould 2003: 79–80). It was the French scientist Pierre Perrault who in 1674 dedicated a study to the mechanical description of how natural water made its way to springs by providing the evidence that rivers were supplied by rainwater and they did not need recourse to internal channels (Gould 2003: 79–80). See note 9.

dimensions. Here, the natural landscape was not conceived as a neutral setting; it was not part of a background, but an active participant in defining and determining human activity, experience and discourse.

The Aesthetics of Nature in the Highlands: Kurangun

In the following I examine the relationships between the natural environment, art and aesthetics in the context of the ancient Elamite highland sanctuary of Kurangun. This investigation builds upon past contributions and insights made by Leo Vanden Berghe (1963, 1986), Pierre de Miroschedji (1981) and Dan T. Potts (2004) in order to query and evaluate the degree by which the natural environment can be said to have played a participatory role in the emergence of the sanctuary. As the reader will by now suspect, my approach seeks to deemphasize anthropocentric agency in favor of a relational dialectic considering both landscape and sanctuary as an architectural whole, only fully understood in relation to each other. According to the theoretical divisions previously established this section addresses *landscape as setting* and not *as representation*.

Description of Kurangun

Kurangun is situated on the ancient highway linking the Elamite western lowland capital of Susa and the eastern highland capital of Anšan (Tal-e Malyan) (Fig. 1). Written sources are silent about the existence of the sanctuary. Consequently, both its native Elamite name and the origins of the name Kurangun remain uncertain.¹⁵ The sanctuary was carved on a rock-cliff about 80 m high, atop an outcrop of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh, which overlooks the Fahliyān River as it flows through the panoramic Mamasani region, in the southwestern province of Fārs, Iran (Fig. 2 a–c).¹⁶ The region preserves substantial archaeological remains, some of which have been recently excavated by a joint Iranian-Australian archaeological team (Potts 2008). The broader project includes excavation of the sites of Tulaspid (Tol-e Spid; MS51), Nurabad-e Mamasani (Tol-e Nurabad), and Jin-Jin (also Jinjunn, Qaleh Kali, Tepe Servan Jinjan,

¹⁵ It is possible that it derives from New Persian *kurang(ah)*, “a place for reviewing troops, a race ground,” itself derived from Mongol *küren*, “camp, tent” (compare Bakhtiari *k?rān*, “encampment”). *Kurang(ah)* may have received the typical Persian geographic ending suffix -an, which itself changes into -un in many dialects of spoken local Persian. Another explanation relates to the Kūh-i-Rang (Kūh’rang) mountain, a source of the Karun River, located west of Isfahān in the Bakhtiari mountains. For a possible Mongol link to placenames formed from kuran, see Eilers 1971: 453–54. I am grateful to Daniel T. Potts for alerting me to this reference

¹⁶ Latitude, 30°1441.38N; Longitude, Easting 51°2738.21E.

or Suravan; MS46). The first two sites have provided evidence of Elamite occupational remains and should therefore be considered part of a regional settlement pattern perhaps associated with the sanctuary of Kurangun. In addition, a stamped brick found at Tulaspid mentions a temple dedicated to the god Kilah-šupir by the 12th century BCE king Šilhak-Inšušinak, further suggesting the presence of religious Elamite architecture in the region (König 1965: 94, 41A; Vanden Berghe 1966: 56; Potts 2004; Potts and Roustaei 2006). At Jin-Jin, recent excavations have uncovered monumental installations recalling Persian palatial architecture (Atarashi and Horiuchi 1963; Potts *et al.* 2007; Potts *et al.* 2009). The building has been associated with Achaemenid (royal) way-stations mentioned in the Persepolis tablets (Potts 2008). Lastly, architectural installations and associated materials have been observed along the slope of the mound where the sanctuary of Kurangun is located; these remains have yet to be thoroughly investigated (Fig. 2d).¹⁷ The architectural remains extend over an area of at least 20 m by 8 m comprising a number of rooms to a depth of up to 1.5 m and over a cleared terrace of land, 15 m by 3 m. Kleiss (1993) believes some pottery shards from this area of the mound could be dated to the second and first millennium BCE, but Potts disputes the accuracy of these statements (*per. comm.*). Instead, the ceramic samples collected so far suggest Sassanian and Islamic periods (Zeidi *et al.* 2009: 165).

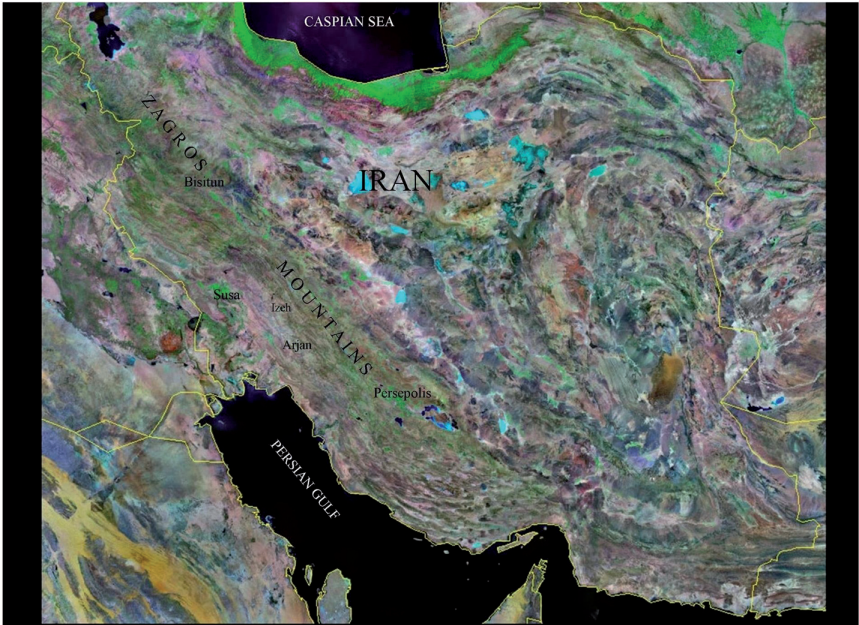
The sanctuary exhibits an exclusive Elamite manifestation of art and religious ideology. Its manufacture required deep cutting into the vertical side of the rock-cliff in order to make a three dimensional spatial unit oriented in a northwest/southeast direction (Fig. 3).¹⁸ Three flights of stairs link the summit of the hill with a rectangular platform measuring about 5 m by 2 m (Fig. 4).¹⁹ The perimeter of the platform is marked by three small receding rectangular depressions enclosing the carved remains of 26 fish swimming together in opposite directions. The fish are rather elongated and characterized by a triangular head, two pairs of fins, and a tail (Figs. 4c and 6b). On the vertical surface of the rock, about 60 cm above the platform, are the remains of a sculpted rectangular panel measuring 1.6 m by 3.64 m. Its surface was carved in low relief with a pious religious scene representing an enthroned divine couple oriented in the direction of the staircase (Figs. 4 and 5b). The bearded male divinity sits on a throne made of a coiled serpent. His right hand holds a ring and rod from which emerge two streams of flowing water arching forward and backward, aimed at groups of worshippers framing the divine couple.²⁰ Carved in relief along the surface of the rock above the staircase are two rows of worshippers standing on flights of stairs. A third group is represented just below the staircase

17 The author visited the site in March 2003 (site listed as MS40 in Zeidi *et al.* 2009).

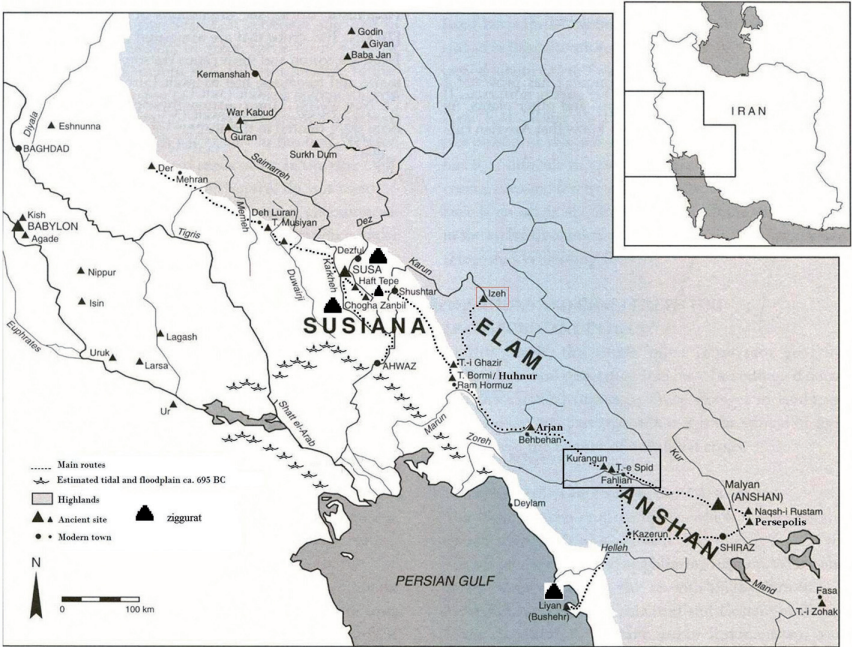
18 The north-south orientation indicated in the line drawing presented by Herzfeld (1941: Abb. 304; see Pl. 5a here) must be an error (Vanden Berghe 1986: fig. 2; see Pl. 5b here).

19 For more on the actual manufacture of the reliefs see Álvarez-Mon (2013).

20 For a detailed description, see Vanden Berghe 1986; Seidl 1986; and Miroshedji 1981: 9, n. 27.



a



b

Figure 1: Landsat photograph and map of southwest Iran. Photograph courtesy of NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and U.S. Geological Survey. Map after de Miroschedji 2003, 16, fig. 3.1, with modifications by the author.

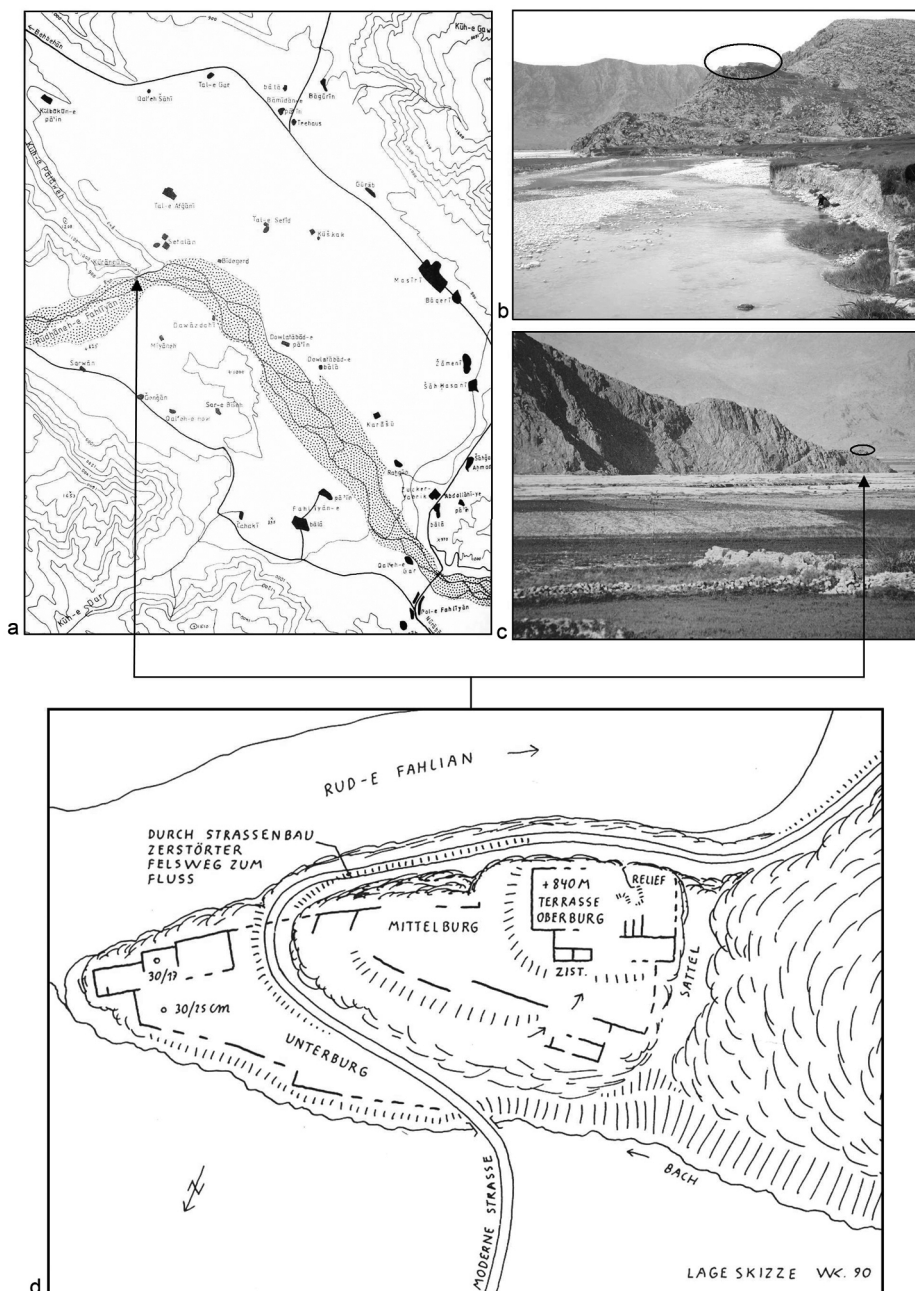


Figure 2a–d: (a) Plan of the Fahliyan River plain and location of Kurangun. After Seidl 1986: 6. (b) Panoramic view of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh hill. Photograph by the author taken in April 2003. (c) Panoramic view of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh hill. After Seidl 1986: Taf. 1b. (d) Sketch of archaeological remains found in Kurangun. After W. Kleiss 1993: map 2.

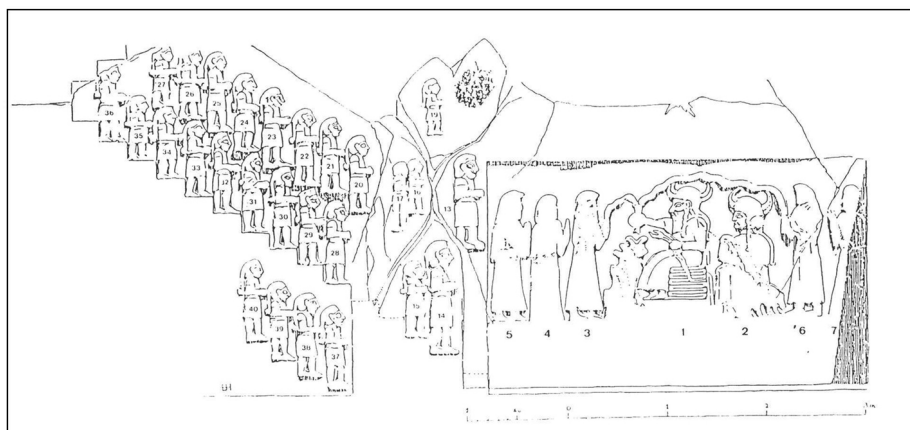


a

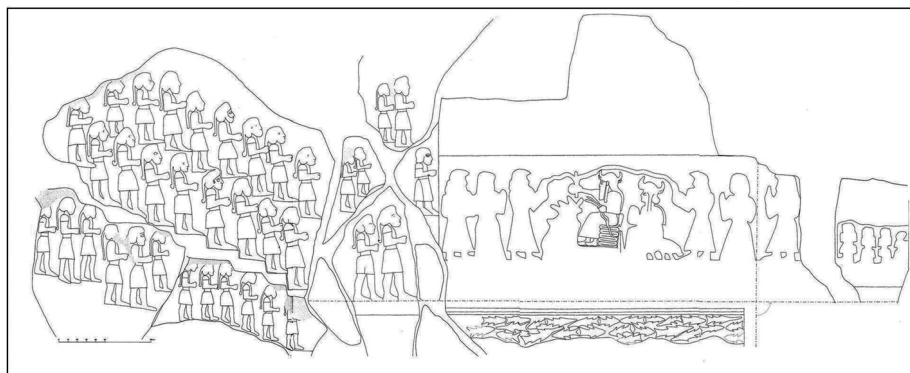


b

Figure 3a and 3b: (a) View of Kurangun. After Seidl 1986: Taf. 3a.
(b) View of Kurangun. Photograph by the author taken in April 2003.



a



b

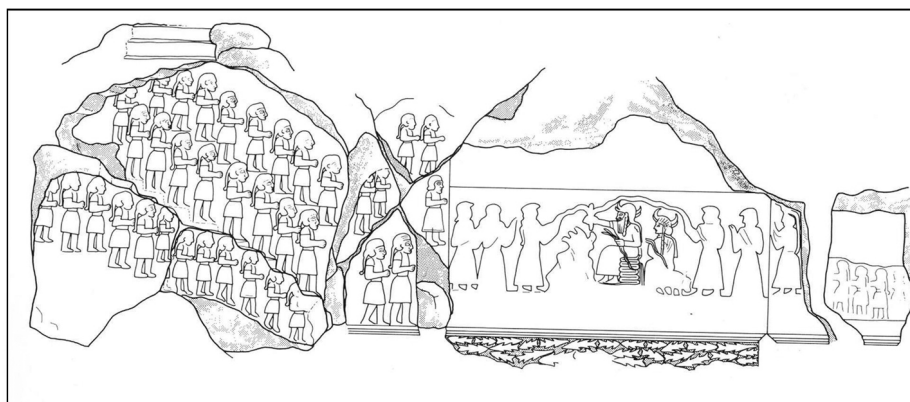


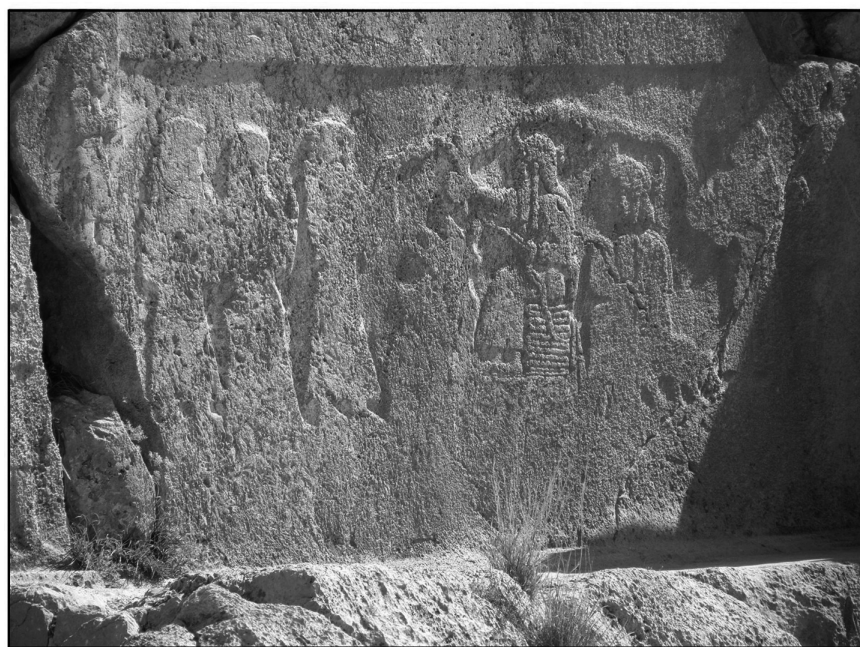
Figure 4a–c: (a) Line-drawing of the Kurangun relief. After Herzfeld 1941: Abb. 304.

(b) Line-drawing of the Kurangun relief. After Seidl 1986: Abb. 1.

(c) Line-drawing of the Kurangun relief. After Vanden Berghe 1984: 28, fig. 2.



a



b

Figure 5a and 5b: (a) View of the worshippers in the staircases. Photograph by the author taken in April 2003. (b) View of the central panel. Photograph by the author taken in April 2003.

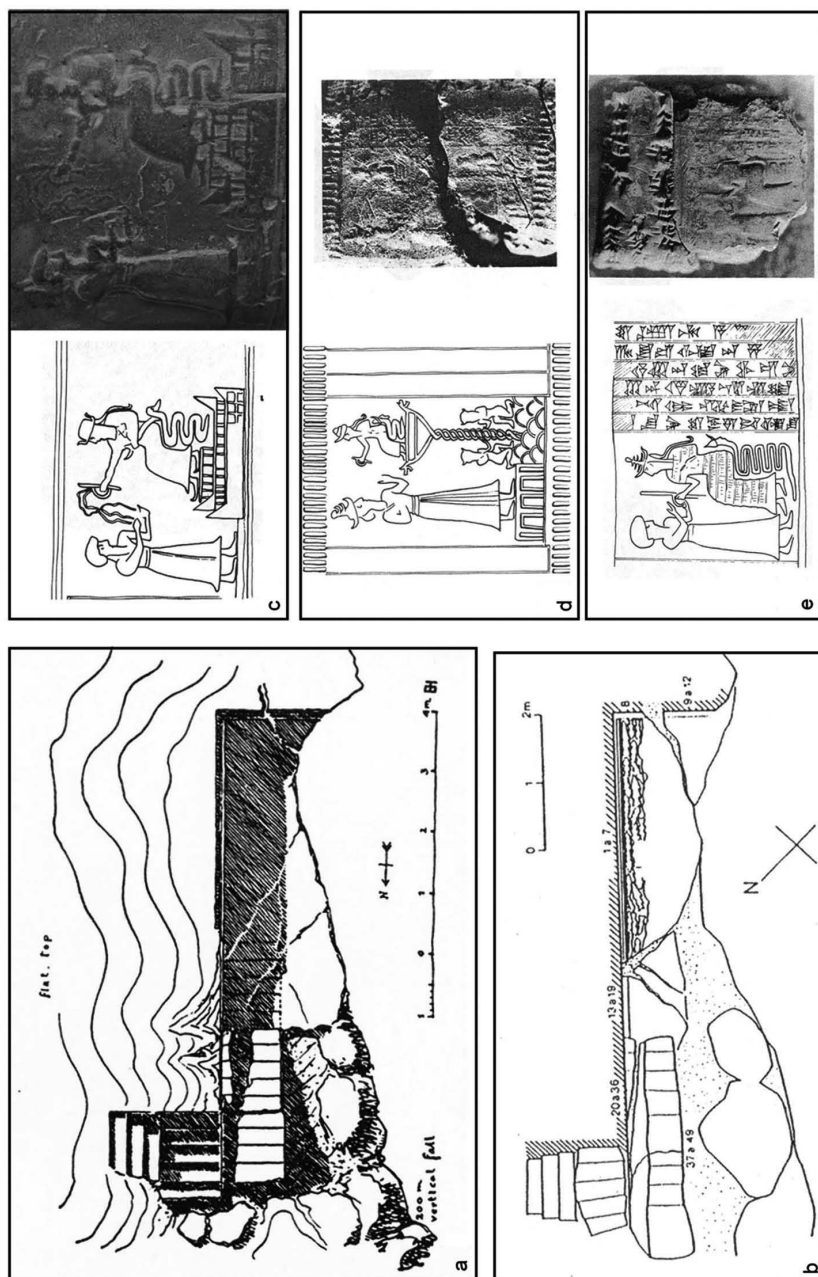


Figure 6a–e: (a) Line-drawings of the horizontal platform. Herzfeld 1941: Abb. 304.

(b) Line-drawings of the horizontal platform. Gropp 1992: 115, fig. 14.2.

(c–e) Photographs and line-drawings of seal impressions representing the Elamite god sitting on a coiled serpent. Line-drawings after Miroshedji 1981, pls. I and II; uppermost photograph by the author; middle and lower after Amiet 1972: pl. 195, 2330.

(Fig. 5a; Kurangun II). These three groups of about 40 male worshippers are represented in profile with long hair braided at the back ending in a looped knob; the lower arms are extended and hands held together at waist level; they wear a short tunic held by a belt (Vanden Berghe 1986: fig. 2).

The existence of Kurangun was revealed to the academic world in 1924 by Herzfeld (1926: 259) (see Fig. 4a). Based on his description and accompanying line drawings, Debevoise (1942: 79) suggested the carvings had been manufactured in two separate time periods. In Debevoise's view, the worshippers exhibited along the staircases predated the Gutian central panel because "it is almost impossible to believe that anyone would have carved such a large group of people simply coming down to look at an earlier relief." Herzfeld's contribution was superseded by fieldwork conducted in 1975 and 1979 by Vanden Berghe (1984, 1986) (see Fig. 4b) and, about the same time, by a study made by Ursula Seidl (1986) (see Fig. 4c). As a result of these two studies, it is presently believed that the three flights of stairs leading to the horizontal platform and the central panel were carved sometime between the 19th and 17th centuries BCE (Fig. 5a; Kurangun I). This timeframe is based on the existence of close iconographic parallels between the imagery exhibited in the central panel and well-dated cylinder seals (see Figs. 5b, 6c–e).²¹ It is also believed the relief was expanded by the incorporation of additional worshippers on both sides of the central panel and along the staircases (Kurangun II). The exact date of this addition remains disputed, as does the carving of the fish over the horizontal platform. Seidl believes they were carved with the rest of the platform, but Carter has pointed out parallels with fish depicted on a single sealing from Anshan (Tal-e Malyan) dated to the late second millennium BCE (Carter 1988: 146, n. 1; Carter 1996: Fig. 34:8).²² Vanden Berghe thought the worshippers were eighth-century BCE additions (1963: 32; 1986, individuals numbers 13–49) but Seidl, followed by Carter and Amiet, proposed a date of the end of the second millennium BCE (Carter 1988: 146; Amiet 1992: 81).²³ In addition, the four individuals carved on the southeastern side (to the right of the central panel) are thought to have been further additions made at the end of the Neo-Elamite period (Kurangun III; Vanden Berghe 1986: numbers 9–12; Seidl 1986: 12–13).²⁴ Thus, all available evidence suggests that the sanctuary was built around 1650

²¹ As suggested by Seidl, close analogies with imagery depicted in the sealings of kings Tan-Uli and Kuk-Našur II suggest a 17th century BCE date.

²² Fish designs, while not abundant, are not uncommon and range from different time periods (Negahban 1991: 96–97).

²³ This late second millennium BCE date is based on parallels with similar worshippers depicted in the reliefs of Kul-e Farah (Izeh/Mālamir). Currently, neither the date nor the specific characteristics of the braided-hair worshippers depicted in these reliefs have been thoroughly studied. A recent study of KF IV dates this relief to the ninth-eighth century BCE (Álvarez-Mon 2013).

²⁴ Seidl (1986: 12, n. 43) noted parallels between these four figures and those depicted at KF II; a relief she dates to the late Neo-Elamite period following Vanden Berghe 1963; Waele 1973; and Calmeyer 1973.

BCE (Kurangun I) and was possibly expanded two times: once some time between the eleventh and eighth centuries BCE (Kurangun II), the other some time during the seventh or sixth centuries BCE (Kurangun III). The presumed abandonment of the sanctuary at the end of the Neo-Elamite period may indicate the existence of a break in continuity of cult in the Mamasami region, which is in contrast with the pattern of continuity of Elamite-Persian interaction revealed by textual and artistic evidence.²⁵ This assessment could be modified as further archaeological work defines the characteristics and identity of the monumental architectural remains unveiled at Jin-Jin.

Interpretations of Kurangun

In the course of the second millennium BCE an abridged version of the imagery depicted in the central panel of Kurangun became an iconic visual formula of Elamite royalty. The scene comprises a male divinity seated on a coiled serpent throne presenting the ring and rod – and at least on one occasion streams of flowing water – to an Elamite ruler or a high status individual (Fig. 6 c–e).²⁶ The identification of the divine couple has been the subject of intense scholarly discussion.²⁷ Amiet (1972: 294; 1973: 17) identified the male divinity as the Elamite Great God (^dGAL), initially recognized as an epithet of Humban and (soon afterward) the highland god Napiriša (following Hinz 1971: 673; 1972: 52). De Miroschedji (1981) suggested instead the lowland western Elamite god Inšušinak. This proposal was rejected by Grillot and Vallat (1984; followed by Vanden Berghe 1986: 159 and Seidl 1986), who reasserted identification with the highland Elamite divine couple. Additionally, Carter (1988: 148), based on Grillot 1986, has stressed the geographic location of the valley at the intersection of roads linking Anšan and the city-port of Liyan under the divine aegis of Napiriša (the Great God) and Kiririša (the Great Goddess) respectively.

More recently, Potts (2004) has questioned the assumed highland/lowland dichotomy between Napiriša and Inšušinak and instead stressed their documented association with water imagery and with their Mesopotamian counterpart Enki/Ea.²⁸ It appears that de Miroschedji (1981: 25) reached a similar conclusion, suggesting at

²⁵ The Elamite open-air sanctuary of Naqsh-e Rostam presents a direct example of continuity between Elamite and Achaemenid-Persian sanctuaries. For continuity in the textual and artistic records see Henkelman 2008; Álvarez-Mon 2010.

²⁶ The iconography has been thoroughly discussed by Miroschedji (1981) and Potts (1999: 182, with refs).

²⁷ See: the central panel in Vanden Berghe 1986: 159, n. 6; Trokay 1991; Potts 2004.

²⁸ The counterpart of Napiriša in Mesopotamia was Enki/Ea, the god of the underground sweet, flowing, water (Abzû) representing fertility and abundance, but there is also evidence suggesting that Inšušinak had Enki/Ea and Enzag as epithets (Vallat 1997; MDP 28, n. 7). This insight may be further supported by two versions of coiled serpents making the throne used by the divinity (one is androcephalic, the other has a dragon head; Seidl 1986: 20–21; Miroschedji 1981: 47).

the end of an exhaustive article: “certainly, we can turn around the difficulty and assume that the relief [this time referring to the upper register of the stele of Untaš-Napiriša] represents Inšušinak under the traits of Napiriša, which implies that the iconography of the two divinities was interchangeable.”²⁹ De Miroschedji and Potts introduce a comparative element into the interpretation of the male divinity from Kurangun. It is tempting to see some sort of syncretism in which the two representatives of lowland and highland Elamite pantheons merged key attributes into a single encompassing reality: a Great God (^dGAL) compellingly manifested through equivalence with the primeval life-giving aspects of flowing water.³⁰

As previously mentioned, written sources remain silent about the existence of the sanctuary of Kurangun. Consequently, discussions of religious beliefs, liturgical and ritual activities, or intended audiences are elusive, and hence we have to rely on the interpretation of its main “architectural” and sculptural characteristics. The reliefs are not visible from the bottom of the valley suggesting that direct interaction with the sanctuary and its manifested deities was established by walking up to the rock-cliff where the sanctuary is located and descending by means of a pathway down three flights of staircases to the “intimate” narrow setting provided by the platform. Indeed, the presence of virtual staircases leading to the platform and rows of devotees sculpted along the staircases corroborate this possibility. Thus the notion can be put forward that Kurangun provided a cultic setting for periodic worship and pilgrimage.³¹

A study by Gropp (1992: 113) proposed conceptualizing the sanctuary as a three-dimensional unity defined by the presence of an enclosed rectangular ritual basin. This is an attractive possibility that cannot be strictly rejected but neither confidently asserted given the lack of supporting evidence. As previously mentioned – and not unlike the carving of worshippers along virtual staircases – the recesses and fish carved over the surface of the horizontal platform imply the presence at least of a *symbolic* basin. Yet, because the outer border is missing a free-standing high-border along the edge of the platform, an actual basin – although in my view most likely – remains unverified. Neither, as Carter suggests (1988: 147, n. 6), is there evidence to support the claim that “water probably flowed out of the rocks at Kurangun in antiquity.” Nonetheless, these hypotheses reaffirm in a practical way what is already suggested by the embedded symbolic interplay of visual features: the holy waters emerging from the hands of the Great God being received by the worshippers and implicitly “streaming down” into a rectangular holy *abzû*-style basin occupied by swimming fish (de Miroschedji 1981: 9).

²⁹ See also Garrison 2009.

³⁰ In this sense, the Old Elamite sanctuary of Kurangun offers a precedent for the religious “revolution” enacted by Untaš-Napiriša at Tchoga Zanbil.

³¹ The only means to have an overall view of the relief is by standing on the edge of the cliff directly on the opposite side. The photographs in Fig. 3 are taken from this vantage point.

Along these lines Potts has taken the interpretation of Kurangun a step further by extending the interpretative boundaries into the natural environment. Potts emphasizes the *immanent* and *numinous* properties of the sanctuary and links its significance to an overall harmonization of meaning that extends beyond the sanctuary itself and embraces the surrounding spectacular natural scenery dominated by the Rudkhaneh-e Fahliyān River (Potts 2004: 143). Indeed, from the vantage of a person standing atop the sanctuary the scenery is breathtaking: the river flows majestically throughout the open valley in a wide bend and turns sharply southwest at the exact point where it strikes the outcrop of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh, directly below Kurangun (see Fig. 3).³² The acute insight provided by Potts – indeed, informed by first-hand experience of the sanctuary and its surroundings – unveils a dramatic panoramic window that extends the interpretative boundaries of the sanctuary into far-reaching artistic and cultural frontiers.

Kurangun and the Aesthetics of the Natural Environment

Kurangun does not lend itself easily to classification. From a structural viewpoint its basic elements – a set of three staircases leading into a single-rectangular platform – conform to principles characterizing (religious) architecture. Ideological similarities reinforce this comparison, namely: first, Kurangun may have been conceived as a shrine “housing” the divine couple; second, it provides visual legitimation of the social order (exhibited through dispensation by the deities of holy water and the ring and rod); and third, it is sacred space, the center of communal pilgrimage and worship.

At the same time, Kurangun is not a building. It has no enclosure walls or gateways, which *de facto* separate that which lies within from that which lies without. The sanctuary is an open stage manufactured on the natural rock-surface and perched over the side of the cliff above the river valley. In this sense, its location and open exposure contrasts with standard notions of religious architecture where walls and gateways ensure the privacy of the act, demarcate sacred from profane space and frame aesthetic experience(s). This significant structural difference questions the authority of sacred-profane dualisms and opens aesthetic experience(s) to a broader level of evaluation. It also invites closer inspection of the main formal structural elements to the extent they showcase key aspects of the Elamite belief system.

³² Potts (2004: 149) has reviewed the importance of water resources in the Nurabad-Fahliyan region, stressing the unique agricultural properties of an area that enjoys the highest rainfall in Fārs, allowing for the production of double cropping.

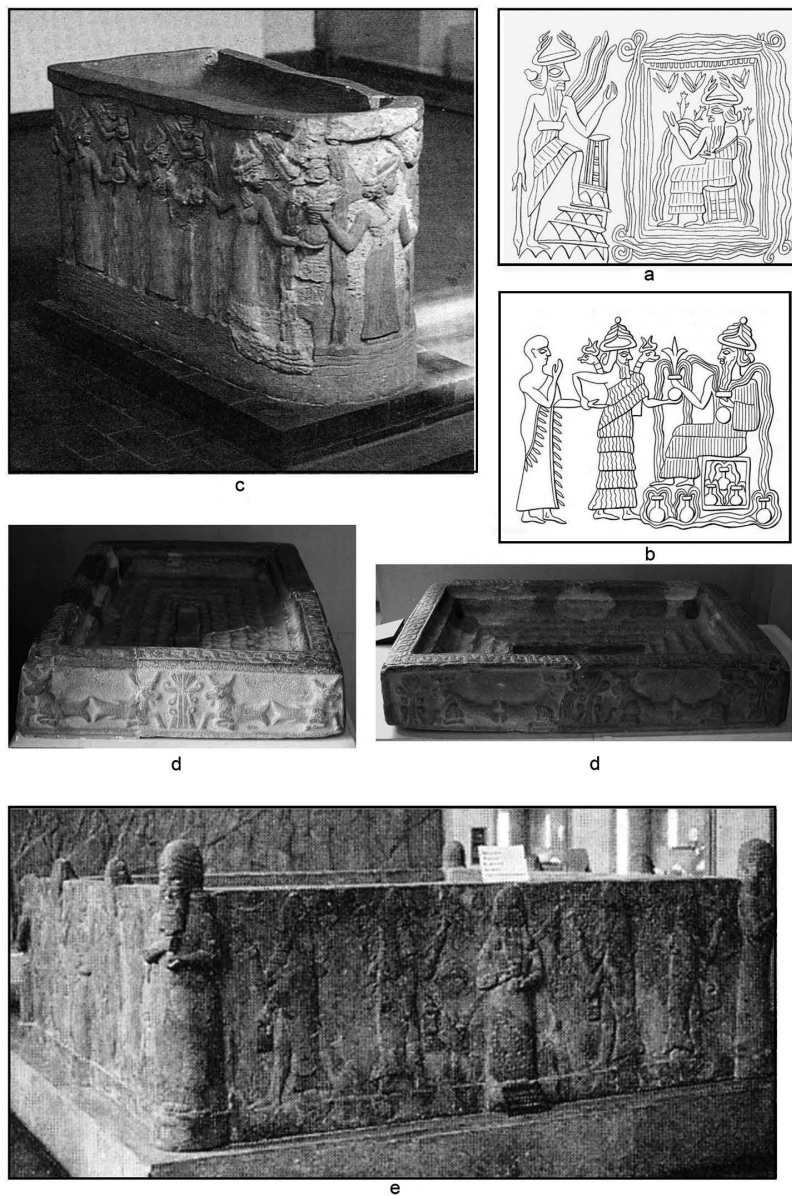


Figure 7a–e: (a–b) Line-drawings of seals representing the god Enki/Ea in his Abzû domain: [a] Akkadian period seal from Ur. After Black and Green 1992: 27, fig. 19. [b] Gudea is introduced by Ningišzida; Neo-Sumerian period. After Black and Green 1992: 139, fig. 115. (c–e) Photographs of “Abzû” basins: [c] Early Dynastic Period from the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu. Reconstructed. After Black and Green 1992: 139, fig. 114. [d] Susa basin probably 12th century BCE. Photographs by the author. [e] From the temple of Assur in the city of Aššur dated to the reign of Sennacherib. After Black and Green 1992: 27, fig. 18.

From a compositional perspective the sanctuary can be said to exhibit *fictional references*, which operate at multiple levels to illustrate concrete aspects of socio-political and religious realities of Elamite culture.³³ First, the representation of worshippers positioned along staircases replicates the real staircases and most likely provides *reference to* the final stage on a pilgrimage and communal ritual (Fig. 5a). The particular religious and socio-cultural characteristics of this act remain unknown yet the attendance of large groups of worshippers suggests a community sharing in their encounter with the divine.³⁴

A second visual interplay is implied between the holy water emanating from the hands of the divinity and reaching the virtual basin enclosing the swimming fish reflecting the possible existence of (*in reference to*) an *abzû* basin (Fig. 4).³⁵ As mentioned above, the outer edge of the platform is missing and hence the existence of an actual basin cannot be confirmed; in my view, however, it is difficult to dismiss the conceptual reference. Stone basins symbolizing the *abzû* were essential cultic accoutrements of Mesopotamian, Assyrian, and Elamite temple ritual. Every temple in Mesopotamia seems have had its own version of the *abzû* (either a small pool, or simply a polished vessel filled with water). They symbolized the fertility and creative aspect of groundwater (see Fig. 7).³⁶

A third and conceptually broader level of ideological analogy can be established between the location of the “chamber” sanctuary atop an outcrop of the Kūh-e Pātāwēh and (*in reference to*) the religious shrine/s topping the Elamite ziggurats. Archaeological and textual evidence confirms the presence of Elamite ziggurats and high shrines (*kukunnum*) at urban centers situated in an area extending from the Susiana plain to the Persian Gulf port of Liyan (Bushire) (see Fig. 1b).³⁷ The Elamite

33 For the purpose of the present analysis I am taking the conception of the sanctuary as a unity; even if the worshippers were a later addition, I think the fundamentals of this analysis remain valid.

34 Conceptual parallels between the Elamite worshippers from Kurangun and the tribute bearers from the Apadana at Persepolis (which are positioned climbing a staircase) suggest that Kurangun may have provided key artistic and perhaps ideological precedents.

35 From a symbolic viewpoint, the presence of fish inside the basin takes us to the domain of Enki. The late Babylonian Epic of *Erra and Išum* describes the Seven Sages of the Abzû-House as *purādu*-fish, a term translated by Dalley (1989: 292) as carp. For the characteristics and origin of the true wild form of carp see Balon 1995.

36 Examples: (1) An Early Dynastic basin from the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu (Tello) (Black and Green 1992: 139, fig. 114)(Fig. 7c); (2) An Assyrian *abzû* basin from the temple of Assur at Aššur dated to the time of Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) (Black and Green 1992, 27, fig. 18)(Fig. 7e); Elamite calcite stone basin from Susa dated to c. 13th century BCE (Amiet 1966: 394, fig. 298 A).

37 The shrine topping the Elamite and Mesopotamian ziggurats was symbolically raised to heaven by a mountain and resided amongst the stars. For ceremonial names of Mesopotamian temples indicating the mediating role of the ziggurat between heaven and earth, see George 1993, in particular Part Two: Gazetteer 63–161. For a concrete example from the time of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1078 BCE) see Grayson 1976: 18. For the temple of Enki at Eridu, the *E-unir*, see Sjöberg and Bergmann 1969: No. I.

kukunnum of Tchoga Zanbil was reached indirectly through flights of staircases.³⁸ As has been noted, the imagery depicted in the central panel of Kurangun was an iconic visual formula of Elamite royalty, elites, and court officials during the second millennium BC. It is uncertain however what ceremonies were enacted in the *kukunnum*, and if the act of receiving the ring and rod and the holy waters from a divinity was part of actual Elamite royal investiture ceremony taking place atop the ziggurat.³⁹

The symbolic role of water takes a further dimension at Kurangun when the natural environment and specifically the presence of the waters of the Fahliyān River are added into the equation. The sanctuary materializes as an *axis mundi* capturing a moment of revelation (a hierophany) in which water imagery intersects and makes permeable a threefold dimension of the human experiential realm combining the supernatural (the hierophany); the socio-religious ritual (the presence of worshipers, and possible references to an *abzû*-style basin and to the *kukunnum*-high shrine); and the natural/physical dimension represented by the river Fahliyan and surrounding natural landscape. In this sense, water emerges as an all-encompassing (fictional/real) immanent “life-force” that directs the attention of mind and senses to link the experience of divine revelation with the experience of the natural environment.

This list of key artistic components suggests that the sanctuary was manufactured where it was in order to deliberately create a vantage point merging a physical three-dimensional construct with the actuality and unavoidable presence of a dramatic natural setting. In my view, the outcome of this configuration was to offer a majestic, multifaceted, physical stage that apprehended the emotional experience triggered by the natural environment and channeled it into an emotive intellectual religious paradigm. Indeed, both realms, I would argue, cannot be disentangled at Kurangun as they form an organic unity which reveals and enunciates the main paradox dominating the aesthetics of the environment, namely, that the object of aesthetic experience happens to be *that* from which we experience. In other words, the borderline between the “in-here” and the “out-there” – between culture (and human agency) and nature (and natural agency) – becomes permeable and so indistinct that the individual is placed in an altered state of being: a quite different (*ganz andere*) type of *numinous* event dominated by the experience of unconstrained space and transcending time.⁴⁰ Hence, in a most dramatic way, it could be said that at Kurangun the

38 Elamite ziggurats were located at Choga Pahn East (KS 102), Susa, Deh-e Now (KS 120), Tchoga-Zanbil, and Liyan (Tol-e Peytul); see Potts 2008, 2010.

39 For the royal investiture ceremony of Cambyses in the temple of Nabu at Babylon in March/April 538 BCE, see George 1996: 380: col iii 24–8, tablet BM 35382.

40 *Numinous* (from Latin *numen*, (divine) presence); in phenomenological parlance, as defined by the theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) in *Das Heilige* (1917), it refers to the transcendental experience of nature (*mysterium tremendum*, *majestas*, *mysterium fascinans*), a quite different (*ganz andere*) type of event.

intrinsic awe-inspiring numinous agency of the natural environment truly embodied and informed the emotional character, perfect realm, and transcendence of the sacred event.

Aesthetics of the Natural Environment and Ancient Near Eastern Art

Pursuing aesthetics in the natural environment through an art historical lens forces interrogation of the material artistic record in unique ways. In the civilizations of the ancient Near East nature was impregnated with concepts derived from religious beliefs. Thus, in a way, these beliefs can be said to have conditioned intention, preparedness, expectation, and qualification of the aesthetic experience(s) of nature and, in a way, to have created the very possibility of these experience(s).⁴¹ In this sense, the humanly made and humanly interpreted and experienced world of nature was socially constructed. In the present analysis and interpretation of Kurangun, however, I have labored to de-emphasize this human-centered approach and suggested a different way of looking and being in the world defined by the existence of an additional dimension of aesthetics that hinges on relationships between religious-sacred manifestations and aesthetic-affective dimensions of the natural environment. In this sense, the natural environment becomes the active medium in which life and human creativity integrated and came to identity.

The implications of such claims for standard definitions of *aesthetics* and the allocation of aesthetic agency to nature brings this essay into theoretical discussions that have traditionally occupied the minds of theologians and philosophers of art. It was as a result of Immanuel Kant's work (1724–1804) that the intellectual basis for the prevalent modern (narrow) notion of aesthetics was established.⁴² Kant discussed the phenomenon of sense experience as part of a broader inquiry into the faculty of judgment, which is governed by principles of understanding through cognition.⁴³ To Kant aesthetics was a subjective activity that obeyed no universal principle and contributed nothing to objective knowledge. Not recognizing objective principles, he determined that judgments of aesthetics had validity inasmuch as they could be

⁴¹ I am grateful to Yasmina Wicks for discussing and commenting on these observations.

⁴² The modern notion of aesthetics materialized out of a wealth of discussions regarding sense appreciation that began during the eighteenth century. Key aspects of these discussions were incorporated into the rubric of *aesthetics* by the German philosopher Alexander G. Baumgarten (1714–1762). He introduced the topic in his 1735 master's thesis and subsequently developed it into what has been portrayed as a "massive, incomplete, and rarely read treatise" (Fenves 2002: 339). See Baumgarten 1988: 3; Kristeller 1998: 425; and Menke 2008: 60–61.

⁴³ See Ginsborg 2008.

defined in terms of the capacity of an object to generate its own aesthetic standards, its own internal purpose (Eagleton 1990; Adams 1992: 374). Taken to the extreme, Kant's ideas provided a foundation for the "aestheticizing" of the artistic record that became so entrenched and paradigmatic to a Western notion of art history and appreciation.

When addressing the aesthetic appreciation of nature, Kant was faced with the challenge of conceptualizing a different order of being: a frameless-other indifferent to human concerns than was not the product of human agency and had traditionally been conceived of as a direct expression of divine order. Influenced by expressions of awe inspired by the experience of nature articulated in the writings of upper-class Europeans Kant spoke of the sublime in nature as having the capacity to produce "soul-stirring delight," challenging the imagination and leading to absolute totality, infinity and certainty (Kant 1952: 503; 476–549). The secularization of the natural environment introduced a new dimension based on emotional scale where the sublime, being unlimited, surpassed in worth the beauty manifested by the art object (Kant 1952: 495). With the brave-new-world of industrialization in full swing, wild nature, unspoiled by human agency, emerged as the true antidote to the corrupted force of civilization and ultimate realm of freedom.⁴⁴

The works on aesthetics by Kant ought to be placed in the context of an increasing emancipation from the authority of religious dogma and the desacralization of human experience and the natural world associated with modernity.⁴⁵ In the context of Christian tradition the role of aesthetics and nature had been a main subject of interest discussed by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Aquinas contrasted the sensible and imperfect realm of creation (the bound and limited) against the supersensible, transcendental and perfect realm of the Creator (the unbound and unlimited). To Aquinas, the natural world could be beautiful and sublime inasmuch as it was an expression of divine agency (the ultimate instigator and source of all that is good and true).⁴⁶ In the unified mediaeval theological order there was no room for the experience of the senses to exist in isolation, autonomously or subjectively, as Kant would later propose. The "art object" as an expression of human agency was the product of a special labor with the raw materials of nature (a view on the role of art going back to Greco-Roman models stipulated first by Socrates and later by Pliny).⁴⁷ To paraphrase Eco (1988: 179), the artist's agency was limited to imitate nature, as a result of the manipulation of

⁴⁴ Rueger 2007: 140.

⁴⁵ "What is at stake here is nothing less than the production of an entirely new kind of human subject – one which, like the work of art itself, discovers the law in the depths of its own free identity" (Eagleton 1990: 19).

⁴⁶ McNerny and O'Callaghan 2010; for Aquinas, see Eco 1988.

⁴⁷ In Pliny's *Natural History* the artist is "an artisan (*artifex*) who by Nature had been granted an insight into an art (*ars, technē*) and has been enabled to execute works from the material that from Nature's hand inherently possesses a potentiality that permits it to be made into a work of art" (Isager 1991: 105).

material provided by nature. Its final result was thus imperfect and deficient: it could not have metaphysical autonomy, nor could it rival in purpose the divine creation.

To come back to our area of research; in a seminal 1995 article Irene Winter suggested two reasons why a comprehensive study of Mesopotamian aesthetics had not yet been undertaken.⁴⁸ First is the apparent difference between Western definitions of “the aesthetic” and Mesopotamian cultural production; and second is the absence of cuneiform documents that present the “Mesopotamian” view. In order to address both hurdles, Winter examined those aspects of Mesopotamian culture that provide insights into indigenous notions of “aesthetics” in terms of a work that is “imaginatively conceptualized and that affords visual and emotional satisfaction.” The picture that emerged is one in which Mesopotamian culture conferred aesthetic *significance* in three domains: *craft-making*, evaluated through expertise and skill; *appearance*, the ability to reflect physical attractiveness, denoting light or luster, intense radiance or luminosity (light being a reflection of vital energy ultimately emanating from the divine or sacred); and *reception*, the capacity to interact with the world by provoking a diverse range of affective responses. “If anything,” concludes Winter, “the links that the ancient Mesopotamians crafted between aesthetic affect and the sacred seem close to what was obtained in Medieval Europe or in Hindu and Buddhist Asia, where a primary role of the aesthetic was to provide a conduit for encountering the divine” (Winter 1995: 2573).⁴⁹

There is little doubt, I think, that the interpretation of Kurangun presented here can be positioned in the category of a pre-Kantian religiously-informed notion of aesthetics. At the same time, by introducing the natural environment into the interpretative equation, the experience of the environment becomes a critical factor informing and determining the emotional context of the religious scene. It is in this sense that the originality and legacy of Kurangun become truly accentuated and that aesthetic notions of *art into landscape* can be framed by discursive analysis. In sum, despite its Western-centered theoretical biases, in the field of ancient Near Eastern art the term aesthetics remains useful and in many contexts, such as when it involves the natural world, is an essential tool of analysis.⁵⁰

I believe there are many stories of the aesthetics of the natural environment embedded in the artistic record waiting to be written. In my interpretation of Kurangun I have prioritized those aspects of the record which promote linking human emotions to the natural world and hint at the uniquely pivotal role that artistic manufacture plays in negotiating and articulating the “cultural pulse” of these relationships. How-

⁴⁸ See also Winter 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2007.

⁴⁹ For additional exploration on the existence of parallels between the Hinduism and Buddhist aesthetics and Mesopotamian aesthetics, see Gell 1998: 116–26; Winter 1994, 2000, 2002; Onians 2002.

⁵⁰ Gell advocated a complete break with the prevalent notion of aesthetics based on its tainted association with Western-centered biases (Gell 1998: 123; and response by Winter 2007). See also Coote and Shelton 1992: 43.

ever, there are limits to this discussion. Elam had two broad categories of ritual places: temples and open-air sanctuaries. Not unlike the expressions of aesthetic excellence and worth emerging from Mesopotamia, Elamite texts include comparable terminology for the building and decoration of temples and divine statues.⁵¹ Yet, as mentioned previously, to date there is no textual evidence related to the existence of Kurangun. For this reason (and because all natural landscapes have their own history of alterations) in the course of this analysis I have refrained from volunteering qualifications of the aesthetic feelings or emotions (affective responses) generated by the natural landscape of Kurangun. I have, however, retained from Potts' analysis the term *numinous* and used the terms *dramatic*, *majestic*, and *awe-inspiring*, which of course are biased by my own aesthetic-emotional response to the experience of Kurangun.⁵²

I presume one can theoretically stipulate a broad range of emotions based on a hypothetical Elamite audience their related socio-cultural and economic conditions and on changing natural phenomena. At the same time, the actual iconographic evidence of Kurangun and the formal ceremonial presentation and revered worship gestures of the individuals participating in the meeting with the Elamite divinities suggest an idealized emotional sacred realm pulsing with vitality and informed by the natural environment. In many ways it is revealing of an aspect of the human condition, a state of being which renews human participation in the grand liturgy of the universe and, at the same time, leaves the individual suspended between heaven and earth, contemplating the sobering limitations and realities of their own nature.⁵³

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51 Generally, see Malbran-Labat 1995; for concrete words, for example, see: *halik ume* (a pleasant (work); a work of art; Hinz and Koch 1987: 599). At the time of Untash Napirisha, the High Temple *kukunum* of Tchoga Zanbil was made of “gold and silver and obsidian and alabaster (glazed) bricks” (in reference to the polychrome of the glazed bricks) Malbran-Labat 1995: 77, Text 10.

52 For a philosophical classification of aesthetic qualities, see Brady 2003: 17–27.

53 Part of this sentence was inspired by Challenger (2011: 186).

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Henry P. Colburn

Art of the Achaemenid Empire, and Art in the Achaemenid Empire

Abstract: This chapter introduces two major aspects of the study of Achaemenid Persian art, namely its definition, and the analysis of quotations of other artistic traditions. Achaemenid art is best defined as consisting of two categories of material. One is the art *of* the empire, that is, art produced in furtherance of imperial goals. The other category consists of art *in* the empire, or the artistic production of regions subject to Achaemenid rule. Though this art often took an outward form typical of its local context it was always produced in dialogue with the art of the empire. In both of these categories visual quotations of other, often earlier, artistic traditions figured prominently. These quotations were utilized by individuals as a means of constructing and negotiating visually their positions in the social order of the empire, and by parsing these quotations it becomes possible to reconstruct some of the social conditions in which they were selected. This concept is illustrated in three case studies that demonstrate the breadth of Achaemenid art and its value as a historical source for the study of the empire.

Keywords: Achaemenid Persian Empire, art, imperialism, ideology, identity

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Introduction: The Sea Change in Achaemenid Historiography

Since the 1970s there has been a significant reorientation in the study of the art of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (c. 550–330 BCE). Previously, Achaemenid art was typically viewed through the lens of aesthetic sensibilities derived ultimately from Greek art. This approach, especially when combined with ancient Greek biases towards the Persians (bolstered by modern orientalist prejudices), led to pejorative assessments and offhand dismissals of it as derivative, repetitive or, as Bernard Berenson (1954: 186) famously put it, resulting from the “originality of incompetence” (Root 1994). Beginning in the 1970s, however, some students of the empire began to consider Achaemenid art not as a failure to reproduce classical illusionism or as an eclectic pastiche of other artistic traditions, but rather on its own terms as a deliberate construction that utilized these traditions to create a specific visual effect and thereby

communicate a specific set of ideas.¹ This paradigm shift was accompanied by parallel developments in Achaemenid historiography that sought to place the Persians themselves at the center of the discourse, rather than viewing them solely from the standpoint of the Greeks (see McCaskie 2012), undermining earlier preconceptions about the weakness and ephemerality of Achaemenid rule. In the past, such preconceptions have informed notions of the scarcity of the empire's material remains, especially in the satrapies, and this scarcity in turn contributed to these notions of weakness, creating a vicious circle driven by what Margaret Root (1991) has called "the politics of meagerness." Now, as these preconceptions are increasingly challenged and found wanting, so too is this scarcity undermined, and indeed there are presently many scholars identifying and studying Achaemenid art in a wide variety of contexts and media (Khatchadourian 2012). Thus the corpus of Achaemenid art is ever increasing. Indeed, one particular collection of material, the seal impressions preserved on the clay tablets of the Persepolis Fortification Archive, includes an estimated 3000 to 3500 individual seals, making it one of the largest extant bodies of ancient art.

The effect of this sea change is that Achaemenid art is now better suited than ever to answer questions about the nature of the Achaemenid Empire, and it is the purpose of this chapter to examine how this may be done. The first section seeks to define Achaemenid art in a manner that includes all artistic material produced in the Achaemenid political ambit, regardless of its outward appearance. Even an object that seemingly betrays no trace of the empire's presence or influence is nevertheless informative of the relationship of its producer and owner to the power structures and cultural practices of the empire. The second section explicates how one of the most common methodologies in the study of Achaemenid art – examining the quotation of foreign artistic traditions from past and contemporary groups alike – can be used to reconstruct aspects of the social conditions throughout the empire. The utility of this methodology is demonstrated by three case studies that also illustrate the diversity both of the art produced within the empire and of the experiences of the individuals responsible for its creation.

Defining the Corpus

Achaemenid art is best understood as comprising two interrelated categories of material. The art of the Achaemenid Empire consists of the artistic output of the imperial centers, especially Persepolis and Pasargadae, and of monuments and objects that seemingly bear close affinities to this output. This was the official art of

¹ This is not to say that prejudicial scholarship on the Achaemenid Empire does not still persist; see Colburn 2011.

the empire, planned centrally by imperial officials with the purpose of communicating and disseminating a specific ideological agenda (Root 1979; 1990; 2000). Perhaps the most emblematic example of this art is the Bisitun Monument of Darius I. This monument (Fig. 1), carved into the living rock high on a mountainside in western Iran, consists of a relief that represents symbolically Darius' overthrow of the usurper Gaumata and his defeat of nine other rebel pretenders, and a trilingual inscription in Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian Akkadian narrating those same events (see Kuhrt 2007: 141–57 for the inscription in translation); versions of the relief and the inscription (in Aramaic) have been found at Babylon and Elephantine in southern Egypt, respectively, suggesting both were disseminated throughout the empire in various forms. In the relief, Darius draws on the composition and style of victory monuments of earlier Assyrian, Iranian and Egyptian kings as a means of communicating his royal status. But he does not simply copy these monuments; rather he eschews the violent imagery of the earlier monuments in order to make an ideological statement about the nature of Achaemenid imperialism, and he manipulates these quotations of earlier traditions in order to represent his uniquely divine position (Root 1979: 194–226; 2013; Feldman 2007). He also introduces new features, such as the trilingual inscription (Finn 2011). In doing so Darius and his advisors created something new and distinctly Achaemenid, and consequently this art provides the foundation of our understanding of how Achaemenid kings conceived of themselves and their world.

But there is also another category of art that is similarly invaluable for understanding the Achaemenid Empire. This is the art *in* the empire, which includes the artistic output of all the regions subject to Achaemenid rule. This corpus is somewhat difficult to delineate in all regions and periods because the extent of Achaemenid control is not always clear. It is important to recognize too that this control was uneven, with some regions of the empire more autonomous than others (Briant 2002: 726–33). The corpus of art in the empire is skewed significantly towards the western half of the empire because this region has been subject to more archaeological investigation than the eastern half, and to more scholarly attention in general. There is also a large category of material originating outside of the empire's borders but that is in dialogue with the art of the empire nevertheless (see Miller 1997). This material is certainly instructive, but more so for foreign perceptions of Achaemenid imperialism than for the social conditions of Achaemenid rule. Thus it is not included here with art in the empire, even though the methodologies discussed below are similarly useful for its study.

Art in the empire is a valuable source of evidence for studying Achaemenid imperialism, whether it is from Babylon or Bactra. As with the art of the empire, this art also made selective reference to different artistic traditions according to the context of its production and decisions made by the artists and patrons responsible for its creation. These references provide valuable clues as to the prevailing social conditions at the time and place of an object's production and deployment. In

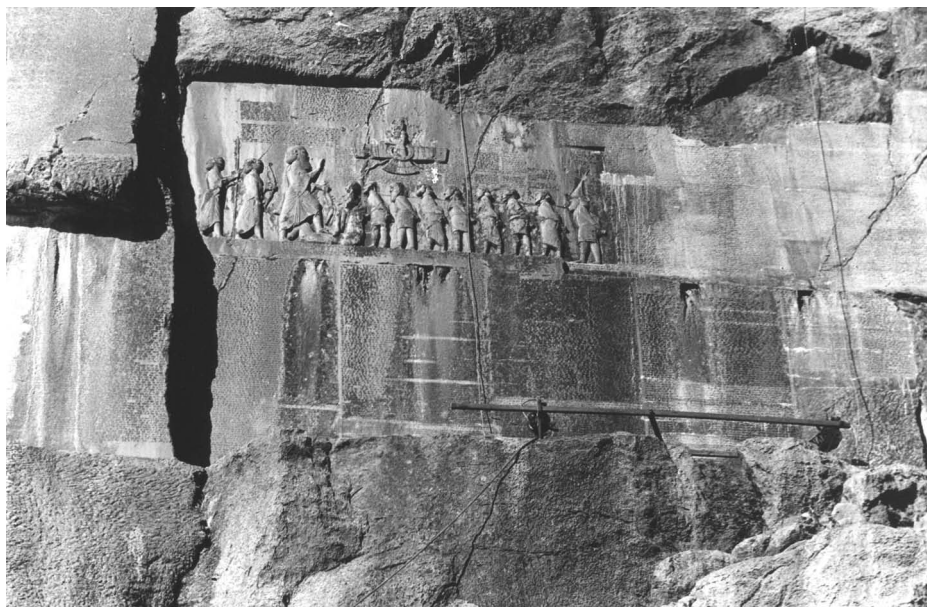


Figure 1: Bisitun Relief of Darius I. Reproduced courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.

some cases, it is possible to discern a reorientation in these conditions as a result of Achaemenid imperialism; in others, the empire is conspicuous by the absence of any apparent reference to it. In this approach agency resides with both the Great King (that is, with the imperial apparatus tasked with planning and producing art), and with the individual subjects of the empire, albeit only those of such social and economic standing as to be involved in the commissioning and production of art as it is visible now.

The reason for articulating these two categories of material is not to accentuate the differences between them, but rather to enlarge the corpus of artistic evidence used to study the Achaemenid Empire. Indeed, in many cases it is impossible or impractical to determine to which category a given object belongs. This is nicely exemplified by Achaemenid metalware, especially drinking vessels. There is a certain corpus of vessel shapes that is typically associated with the Achaemenids, including *phialai* (shallow drinking bowls) and *rhyta* (drinking horns, typically with animal protomes).² Certain silver *phialai* bear inscriptions indicating their production in the

² One of the endemic problems in the study of Achaemenid art in general and metalware in particular is the lack of reliable provenances, and this is certainly the case with the vessels discussed here. This is not the place to examine this topic in detail, and readers should consult Oscar Muscarella's contribution to this volume for a fuller treatment. Here it suffices to note that the authenticity of the vessels themselves is reasonably assured on account of their construction, metallic content, and weights



Figure 2: Line drawing of a relief from the tomb of Petosiris, Tuna el-Gebel, Egypt. From Lefebvre 1923–24.

context of the imperial court (Gunter and Root 1998). This would place them in the category of art of the empire, since they were produced at the behest of the Great King and distributed as royal gifts in furtherance of imperial goals. But not all such *phialai*

(which combined make a round figure in Persian *sigloi*); see Curtis *et al.* 1995; Gunter and Root 1998. The argument that the inscriptions are modern additions is based on a *hapax legomena*, which, given the small size of the corpus of Old Persian inscriptions, is hardly surprising. There are similar problems with Achaemenid metal *rhyta* as well (see Muscarella 1980).

bear inscriptions, and bowls of this shape were produced in other parts of the empire, such as Anatolia (Miller 2010). Likewise, the clearest and most direct evidence for the production of *rhyta* comes not from southwestern Iran but from Egypt. Some of the reliefs decorating the interior of the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel in Middle Egypt (Lefebvre 1923–24; Cherpion *et al.* 2007), dating to the late fourth century BCE, depict craftsmen at work, some of whom are shown making *rhyta* of a seemingly Achaemenid sort (Fig. 2). Though the setting for these scenes is not readily apparent they do suggest the production of such vessels in an Egyptian context, implying that vessels closely associated with the Achaemenid cultural ambit could be made far from the centers of the empire.

Together these two categories of material constitute the corpus of Achaemenid art. Many objects in this corpus also clearly belong to other artistic traditions, but since they are produced in dialogue with other examples of Achaemenid art they have the potential to inform us about the empire in at least some small way.

The Analysis of Visual Quotations

The study of Achaemenid art has been focused primarily on the identification of quotations of other artistic traditions within it. This is especially true for the art of the empire (see, for example, Root 1979 and Boardman 2000, who employ this technique to very different ends), in large part due to the assumption that the Persians had no tradition of monumental art prior to the foundation of their empire by Cyrus and that they accordingly employed craftsmen from among their newly conquered subjects to create it. The identification of these artistic quotations was a means of identifying the various “sources” of Achaemenid art. The assumptions that inform this approach, however, can be challenged on a variety of grounds that undermine it considerably. The first of these, that the Persians were imperial parvenus with no artistic tradition of their own, requires reassessment in light of the clear links between the Elamite glyptic art of Susa and that of Persepolis, mediated by heirloom seals from Anshan, Cyrus’ original seat of power (Root 1979: 28–42; Garrison 2002; 2011a). These links are highly suggestive of Elamite-Iranian acculturation in the centuries leading up to the foundation of the empire, resulting in the creation of a Persian identity that included artistic attributes in addition to religious and linguistic ones (see also Henkelman 2011).

The role played by foreign craftsmen, Lydians and Greeks especially, in the creation of art of the empire is often overstated (for example, Boardman 2000: 128–34). It is evident that foreign workers were employed at Persepolis and Pasargadae; Elamite administrative tablets from the Fortification and Treasury archives at Persepolis make ample reference to non-Persian workers, some even in the context of artistic production (Henkelman and Stolper 2009; Roaf 1980), and the masonry techniques used at Pasargadae have clear and deliberate affinities with Lydian and Ionic Greek architecture (Nylander 1970). The most spectacular evidence for foreign

craftsmen is the so-called Foundation Charter from Susa (DSf; Root 2010: 178–86; Kuhrt 2007: 492–95), a trilingual cuneiform text in which Darius proclaims that his palace at Susa was built by workers from throughout the empire using materials brought from their respective homelands. Among these are Ionian and Sardian stone-cutters, providing, it seems, confirmation of the importance of Greek and Lydian artisans at this imperial center (and by extension other centers as well). But the Foundation Charter was not intended to be a literal record of the palace's construction. Rather, it is an ideological statement of the extent of Darius' power and the great variety of peoples and resources at his command (Root 2010: 185–86). The wording of the inscription is vague, and in at least one instance illogical, since the Egyptians were unlikely to have supplied the silver given the scarcity of their natural sources of it. Also, the Greeks and Lydians are only two among several groups of workers listed in this text, and if the wages provided to sculptors in the Persepolis Treasury Tablets are any indication they were no more important than any other type of craftsman (Roaf 1980: 69). The conception, design and planning of Achaemenid imperial monuments clearly took place at the highest levels, while the craftsmen themselves mostly just followed directions (Root 1979: 15–23; Roaf 1990). So although Greeks and Lydians certainly participated in the production of art at Persepolis, Pasargadae and Susa, it was not in a creative capacity. Rather, they did so because their participation furthered the objectives of the Great King in creating the specific visual effect that he wanted.

The centrality of Persian initiative to the creation of art of the empire does not diminish the importance of these quotations for understanding the meaning and purpose of this art; rather, the transfer of agency to the Persians increases the value of this art as evidence for how Achaemenid ideology was envisioned and constructed. This was first made clear in a fundamental study by Margaret Root (1979), wherein she argued that the quotations and manipulations of other artistic traditions, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Greek alike, that appear at Persepolis and elsewhere could only have resulted from a Persian royal directive. The Persians had ample opportunity for exposure to the arts of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and even central Asia in the course of the campaigns of Cyrus (recounted by Briant 2002: 31–49), and further exposure to Egypt in the reign of Cambyses; indeed, many of the ranking Persians of Darius' day would have served on these campaigns, including Darius himself (in Egypt; Herodotus 3.139), and therefore seen firsthand, and perhaps plundered as well, the products of many different artistic traditions. Moreover, in the years following these inaugural campaigns the empire was interconnected by a system of roads and way stations that facilitated the easy movement of people, objects and ideas between the imperial centers and the furthest reaches of the empire; this created environments in which peoples of different cultures and backgrounds could and did interact (Colburn 2013). For example, in an Aramaic letter (Porten and Yardeni 1986–99: A6.12; Kuhrt 2007: 819) the satrap of Egypt, Aršama, writes to his Egyptian steward to instruct him to pay a sculptor whom he had brought to Susa to make copies of some statues, and then to

ship those copies to him. It is unclear where Aršama was at the time of writing, but regardless, this letter shows how the Persians could effect the movement of objects and artisans throughout the empire.

Persians like Darius and Aršama, then, had an extensive visual repertoire on which to draw for the planning and design of imperial monuments, and this repertoire also informed the objects that they commissioned for themselves. These quotations were the visual dimension of an ideological program that emphasized the creation of a unified political entity, the Achaemenid Empire, from a variety of different peoples with different cultural and material traditions. They were also used to represent the relationship between the king, the people, and the god Auramazda; in particular, the king was frequently placed in a position that was in other artistic traditions reserved for deities. A full interrogation of the religious significance of these depictions is beyond the scope of this essay (see instead Garrison 2011b; Root 2013), but it seems the king wished to make this aspect of his representation intelligible in a variety of cultural contexts. Indeed, these quotations ensured that someone from anywhere in the empire would find at least some aspect of the art of empire to be somewhat familiar, even if he was unable to interpret its significance more specifically.

In the study of art in the empire, quotations of Achaemenid material culture in local artistic traditions play a particularly central role. Studies of the impact of Achaemenid rule on a given site or region often rely exclusively on the presence of art of the empire as a means of gauging the breadth, depth, or density of that rule; the apparent absence of this art, and of anything readily identifiable as Achaemenid material culture, leads to conclusions that Achaemenid rule was either very tolerant of local cultures or simply anemic. This approach is quite crude in that it assumes a linear and overly simplistic relationship between imperialism and material culture and obscures the many complex ways in which they interact. Moreover, it also emphasizes the scarcity of material correlates of Achaemenid rule. Margaret Root has challenged this scarcity on several grounds; most relevant here is her argument that quotations of Achaemenid material culture are much more prevalent in the empire than this conventional methodology would suggest, in large part because the objects featuring these quotations are frequently classified according to the apparent geographical and cultural context of their production (Root 1991). Perhaps the most telling example of this is the category of material often identified as “Greco-Persian” (for example, Boardman 2000: 152–74). The objects placed in this category tend to have one or more ostensibly Greek features among all their other formal characteristics, and they are resultantly attributed to a Greek (or Lydian) production context. But the seal impressions preserved in the Persepolis Fortification Archive demonstrate the range and variety of motifs and styles that the seal carvers of Persepolis were capable of quoting, and indeed among these are impressions of seals that do include apparently Greek features of some sort. In essence the “Greco-Persian” label gives priority to Greek features over quotations of any other artistic tradition, with the result that material that is clearly in dialogue with the art of the empire, and therefore evidence

of an instance of Achaemenid rule, is viewed instead as evidence of the diffusion of Greek art (Gates 2002).

There are many more ways in which Achaemenid imperialism could potentially affect the artistic output of the satrapies than just the quotation of Achaemenid imperial iconography. This is well demonstrated in a recent study of Achaemenid Sardis by Elspeth Dusingberre (see also examples in Khatchadourian 2012). In her examination of funerary practices, she observes a significant increase in the number of tumulus burials during the period of Achaemenid rule (Dusingberre 2003: 128–57). In earlier times tumuli were the exclusive prerogative of the kings of Lydia, so the adoption of these tombs was a reference to Lydian cultural and material practices. But these tombs also contained funerary couches, which were not a feature of the earlier royal tumuli. Also, much of the jewelry recovered from these tombs (as well as from other contemporary tombs at Sardis) appears to quote the art of the empire. Dusingberre argues convincingly that, despite the Lydian associations of tumuli, their use as burial markers had more to do with the deceased's socioeconomic standing than with their ethnic identity. The prevalence of tumuli in this period was a result of Sardis' prosperity as a satrapal capital and major imperial center. This illustrates how Achaemenid rule could affect local material culture in a way that did not result in overt references to the art of the empire; it shows too the importance of examining all of the visual quotations discernible in an object before using it to address a broader question about the nature and impact of Achaemenid imperialism.

The quotations of foreign artistic traditions in both the art of and the art in the empire were the result of choices made in the process of their creation, both by the artisans responsible for their production and by the patrons or customers who ultimately consumed them. The production of an object can be conceived of as a sequence of choices, often called the *chaîne opératoire* by anthropologists (Bleed 2001). In the production of lithic tools, the field in which this concept was first deployed, the choices were typically about the selection of raw materials or where to remove the next flake. In the production of art the choices are much more varied and numerous, and include the selection of an artisan by a patron, as well as decisions about design and composition, in addition to those made in the actual course of production. Some of these choices related directly to an object's material properties or physical function; a bowl, for example, requires one of a certain range of shapes in order to be successful as a bowl, and the artisan made choices in the course of making the bowl in order to achieve a successful bowl shape. Other choices, however, are between functionally equivalent alternatives, and the artisan chose between them on much less tangible grounds, such as tradition, habit, expectations as to how a certain sort of object should look, appropriateness to a given context or individual's identity, ideological goals, etc. (Carr 1995; Schiffer and Skibo 1997). In the course of making such choices artisans and patrons drew on visual repertoires that included foreign artistic traditions, and elected to quote such traditions when they believed it advanta-

geous. The specific reasons informing these decisions were not always clear to those making them; as often as not the artisan or patron would not be able to say exactly why he chose one alternative over another, and indeed he may not always be aware he was making a choice at all. But all of these decisions, conscious or otherwise, were made in order to achieve what was perceived as a desirable result.

It is this expectation of success that makes these quotations especially valuable for reconstructing the social conditions in which an object was created. This is because the decisions made in the process of design and production to make these visual references did not take place in isolation. Rather, they were made with the expectation of a certain outcome that, if reasonable, was informed by the broader circumstances and conditions current at the time and place of production. This concept is best articulated by Michael Baxandall in his classic book *Patterns of Intention*, and is nicely illustrated by his study of the Forth Rail Bridge in Scotland (Baxandall 1985: 12–40). The form of the bridge, he argues, was informed by a wide variety of factors. Some of these pertained directly to the bridge's physical function and its need to support train traffic and withstand winds. Others pertained more specifically to the bridge's form. Indeed, the bridge's designer, Sir Benjamin Baker, defending his design against the criticism of the pre-Raphaelite poet William Morris, who called it "the supremest specimen of ugliness," explained that "the object had been so to arrange the leading lines of the structure as to convey an idea of strength and stability" (quoted in Baxandall 1985: 24–25). In order to achieve this goal Baker drew in part on the design of Asian cantilever bridges (Baxandall 1985: 19–20). The decisions made by Baker in his design process were based on his own notions of what a bridge should be, his training as an engineer, and the intellectual and social climate of Victorian Britain. As Baxandall so elegantly demonstrates, the visual results of these decisions point to the conditions in which they were made.

Similarly, the decisions made by the maker and owner of Gordion Seal 73 (Dusinberre 2005: no. 38), a conoid chalcedony stamp seal excavated at Gordion, resulted in a distinctly Neo-Babylonian appearance, in terms of both the style of carving and the motif of the worshipper before an altar (Fig. 3). Though we cannot say specifically what the seal's owner hoped to achieve through his or her selection of a seal that quotes Neo-Babylonian glyptic, this selection was presumably made in a context in which the imagery of Neo-Babylonian glyptic had some currency. Indeed, there are similar such quotations on sealings from Uruk, Nippur, Persepolis, and Daskyleion (see references in Dusinberre 2005: 59), as well as on a stamp seal excavated at Taxila (Marshall 1951: 677 no. 1); in light of these conditions it stands to reason that the owner of Seal 73 constructed his identity in a manner that transcended the local trends at Gordion. The great variety of seals from Achaemenid Gordion, a stark contrast to earlier periods, shows that he was not alone in doing so, and despite its relative political unimportance in this period, Gordion was nevertheless a heterogeneous place, with social links to other parts of the empire (Dusinberre 2005: 24–27).

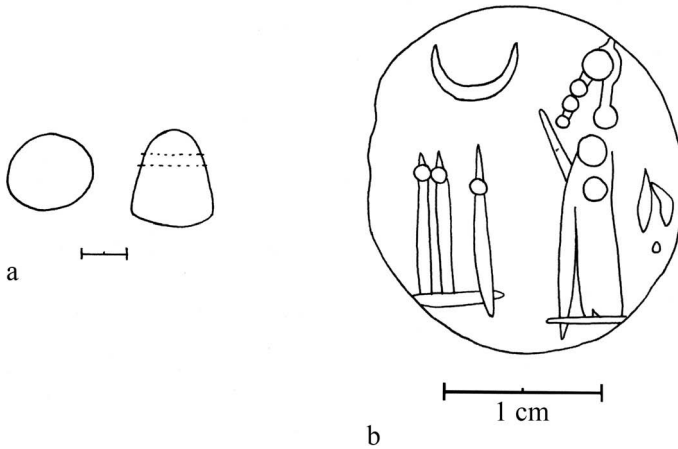


Figure 3a and 3b: (a) Gordion seal 73. Reproduced courtesy of the Gordion Archaeological Project, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. (b) Line drawing of impression of Gordion seal 73. Reproduced courtesy of Elspeth Dusinberre.

The use of other artistic traditions as a means of locating oneself in the broader social order is not a phenomenon unique to Achaemenid art. It has a long history in the Near East in particular (Garrison 2012), but it also is a social strategy employed by a wide variety of societies and cultures. In an important and wide-ranging study, Mary Helms (1993) has shown that in many early and traditional societies, individuals and political entities derive their charismatic authority, both political and social, from connections, both real and imagined, to “superordinate centers” of social order. These centers were distinguished by their remoteness, which was sometimes geographical and sometimes chronological or cosmological (and no distinction was made between these types of remoteness). Achaemenid art fits neatly into this schema: the visual quotations of different artistic traditions demonstrated ostensible connections to superordinate centers, some of which, like Persepolis, were real places, and others, like Assyria, were constructs based on collective notions of past importance. The identification of these superordinate centers is particularly valuable for reconstructing how different people in the empire viewed the world in which they lived.

Case Studies

The following case studies are intended to illustrate the principles discussed above in a manner that demonstrates the utility of parsing visual quotations in order to understand the social context of a given object’s creation. They are not meant to be exhaustive discussions by any means; rather, they are examples that serve to introduce the methodology articulated in the previous section, as well as the diversity and variety of Achaemenid art.

The Statue of Darius from Susa

The first case study considers the freestanding statue of Darius I found at Susa on Christmas Eve, 1972, by the *Délégation archéologique française en Iran* and now housed in the National Museum of Iran (Fig. 4). Both the statue’s trilingual cuneiform inscription (DSab) and the Egyptian greywacke from which it was carved (Yoyotte 2010: 268–69) attest to its creation in Egypt. Yet it is undoubtedly an example of art of the empire because it was made at Darius’ command “so that whoever sees it in time to come will know that the Persian man holds Egypt” (Kuhrt 2007: 478), and thus served as a vehicle for communicating Achaemenid ideology. That it was made by Egyptian sculptors for a seemingly Egyptian audience does not change this characterization, since as discussed above foreign craftsmen were frequently employed at Persepolis in the creation of official imperial art. Although the date and circumstances of its removal to Susa from Egypt remain uncertain its integration into a monumental gateway at the palace at Susa (and its possible reproduction there;



Figure 4: Statue of Darius from Susa. Reproduced courtesy of Jean Perrot.

Razmjou 2002: 87–89) shows that in antiquity it was considered representative of the imperial decorative program.

The statue is preserved from the neck down; originally it would have stood approximately 3 m high, making it over life-size. It depicts Darius in a striding pose with his left foot further forward than his right. He holds his left arm horizontally across his chest and his right straight down at his side. He wears a full-length robe with flaring sleeves gathered high on his waist with a belt; a dagger in a scabbard is tucked into the belt at the front. In his left hand he holds what seems to be the stem of

a flower, the top of which is not preserved, and his right hand is filled with a cylinder, in keeping with Egyptian sculptural practice. At the back of the statue is a dorsal pillar that runs its entire preserved height. The cuboid base of the statue features incised decoration; at the front and back is a well-known Egyptian image, the “uniting of the two lands,” and on either side is a row of kneeling figures representing the peoples of the empire (Yoyotte 2010: 288–96; Roaf 1974). The statue is inscribed with a trilingual cuneiform inscription (DSab) on the lower folds of Darius’ garment; there are hieroglyphic inscriptions on the belt and lower folds of the garment, as well as on the top and sides of the base. No traces of the statue’s head survive; presumably it was largely consistent with the representations of the Great King at Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam (Luschey 1983), though it is also possible that it had a more Egyptian aspect (Trautnecker 1995).

As the preceding description has indicated, the statue of Darius quotes Egyptian artistic tradition in a number of places. Most distinctive is the representation of the “unification of the two lands” on the base of the statue (Yoyotte 2010: 282–84). This image shows two fecundity figures representing Upper and Lower Egypt binding together a lotus and a papyrus plant (the two plants also representing Upper and Lower Egypt), with the hieroglyph for “unite” in between them. This image goes back well into the Old Kingdom, and it is typically placed beneath the king, either below a cartouche containing his name or on a throne or statue base (Schäfer 1943). Thus its inclusion on the statue of Darius is a straightforward appropriation of Egyptian iconography and of the royal ideology underlying it. Similarly, the figures representing the subject peoples of the empire have distinctive Egyptian antecedents, namely the depiction of foreign prisoners of war (Roaf 1974: 75–76; Root 1979: 138–47; Calmeyer 1991). Prisoners are identifiable as such because of their non-Egyptian attributes, especially their beards and clothing, and because their ethnonyms are written in studded cartouches representing city walls. Since the predynastic period they were depicted kneeling and bound, and placed in a location where they were either beneath the king, or in some cases actually trod upon by him (Ritner 1993: 113–36). The placement of the subject peoples on the base of the statue, and therefore below the king, where they are effectively trampled by him, is consistent with Egyptian iconography, as is their kneeling pose and the cartouches that accompany them. The connection with Egyptian kingship is also reinforced by the hieroglyphic inscriptions (Kuhrt 2007: 478–79), which praise Darius as pharaoh and frequently invoke the Egyptian god Atum (Yoyotte 2010: 278–81). Other aspects of the statue are also clearly borrowed from the Egyptian visual repertoire. Darius’ right hand is filled by a stone cylinder. This is a common feature of Egyptian statuary, and it has been interpreted variously as a shortened staff, a roll of linen, or simply a convention for representing an empty hand (see discussion in Fischer 1975). Likewise, the striding pose of the statue, with the left foot in front of the right, and with the stone in between them left in place, is also a regular feature of Egyptian statuary in particular.

The statue of Darius, then, draws heavily on Egyptian representations of kingship in order to present Darius as a royal figure. At the same time it also utilizes visual references to Mesopotamian and Iranian art to nuance this presentation and adapt it to fit Achaemenid imperial ideology. For example, Darius is depicted wearing “court garb” (Stronach 2011) and carrying an Elamite dagger (Henkelman 2003: 190–91); both are accoutrements of the Persians on the Persepolis reliefs and part of Darius’ representation of himself as a “Persian man,” as alluded to in the statue’s cuneiform inscription and referenced in the art of the empire in various media. The figures representing the subject peoples on the base of the statue have also been adapted to better fit Achaemenid imperial ideology. The figures hold their arms up in front of them, with their open palms facing upward. This is in sharp contrast to the depiction of prisoners, whose arms are always bound behind their backs. Rather, in Egyptian art this pose is used to represent carrying or support (Roaf 1974: 77), and the spatial relationship between the subject peoples and the figure of Darius imply that they are supporting the king. This imagery has close analogies at Persepolis and in the façades of the royal tombs at Naqš-e Rostam. There the king is depicted on a platform supported by two or three rows of subject peoples in an “atlantid” pose with their arms raised and their palms facing upward (Schmidt 1953: 116–20, 134–37; 1970: 77–118). The atlantid pose has a long history in Mesopotamian art, where it usually denotes a divine context. Its use at Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam to support the king is a means of representing the relationship between the king and the people of the empire, that is, it reinforces the king’s amalgamation of political and religious authority with the support of his subjects (Root 1979: 131–61; Garrison 2011b: 43–47). This notion is furthered by the inclusion of Persians among the subjects of the empire, at Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam, as well as on the statue of Darius (Roaf 1974: 94–98; Yoyotte 2010: 289), which, visually at least, puts the Persians on a par with everyone else rather than emphasizing their (military) superiority. Finally, the trilingual cuneiform inscription on the statue (written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian) is a feature of Darius’ ideological program, and served as a linguistic epitome of the empire’s ecumenical nature (Finn 2011).

The statue of Darius was intelligible in two different contexts. In an Egyptian context it was a statement of Darius’ role and legitimacy as pharaoh. In the context of the imperial court it communicated Darius’ ideological program in which he cast himself as a Persian heroic figure, who straddled the earthly and cosmic realms with the support and participation of all the peoples of his empire. Moreover, at the court, the Egyptian visual references made in the statue contributed to the notion of the universality of the empire, and in Egypt the adaptation of the Mesopotamian atlantid motif to the Egyptian prisoner motif contributed to the notion that Achaemenid rule was different from other forms of imperialism, emphasizing cooperation over domination. The selection of the specific assortment of visual elements that comprise the statue also provide a window into how Darius and the others involved in its design and execution conceived of their larger world. The combination of Mesopotamian,

Persian, and Egyptian features implies that the cultures that informed these different artistic traditions were the superordinate centers from which Darius drew his charismatic authority.

The Seals of Parnakka

The seals of Parnakka (PFS 9* and 16*), chief administrator at Persepolis between 506 and 497 BCE (Briant 2002: 425, 466–71), are preserved through impressions on many tablets of the Persepolis Fortification Archive. Though these seals were commissioned and used by a high ranking official of the empire with close familial ties to the Great King (he was either Darius' uncle or his cousin) and very likely produced in the environs of Persepolis, their style and iconography reflect the personal preferences of Parnakka rather than any imperial artistic program. Thus these seals are perhaps best considered an example of art in the empire, one that speaks to conditions at Persepolis itself, since although they draw on similar imagery and visual traditions as art of the empire, their distinctiveness suggests they are the result of his choices as an individual.

PFS 9* (Garrison and Root 2001: cat. no. 288) is the earlier of the two seals, and was in use between 505 and 500 BCE. It features a hero engaged in combat with an ostrich, with a rampant goat in the terminal field (Fig. 5a). The hero wears an "Assyrian garment" and grasps the ostrich by the neck. The inscription, in Aramaic, reads "Parnakka." The seal is carved in the Fortification Style, a style of carving endemic to Persepolis and quite prevalent among the seal impressions preserved in the Fortification Archive (Garrison and Root 2001: 18). Parnakka replaced PFS 9* with PFS 16* sometime between May 21 and June 6 of 500, and the change is noted in at least two tablets from the Fortification Archive (PF 2067 and 2068; Hallock 1969: 639). PFS 16* (Garrison and Root 2001: cat. no. 22) also features a heroic encounter, this time in a "master of animals" pose with the hero holding two rampant lions to either side of him by the throat (Fig. 5b). Once again the hero wears an Assyrian garment, and the Aramaic inscription reads "Seal (of) Parnakka, son of Aršam." This seal is carved in the Persepolitan Modeled Style, a highly plastic style with clear links to earlier traditions of Assyrian and Babylonian seal carving (Garrison and Root 2001: 16–17).

These brief descriptions do not do justice to the seals of Parnakka, but the aspects of these seals listed above do provide a basis for reconstructing the conditions and intentions informing their creation. PFS 9* includes a number of features that refer to earlier Assyrian and Babylonian artistic traditions. Most striking in this regard is the motif of the heroic encounter with an ostrich, a motif that occurs in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian glyptic (Collon 1998; Herbordt 1992: pl. 5 nos. 3, 5), as well as in other media. The garment worn by the hero, a wrapped robe over a short undergarment, is an Assyrian iconographic trait that appears in both glyptic and relief sculpture (Garrison and Root 2001: 505). PFS 16* also features a hero wearing an Assyrian garment,

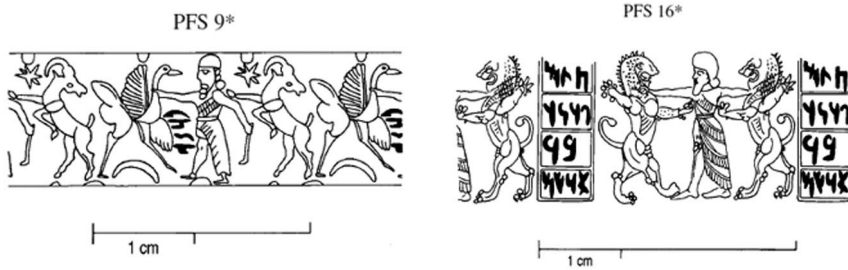


Figure 5a and 5b: Line drawings of impression of PFS 9* and 16*. Reproduced courtesy of the Persepolis Seal Project.

and the composition of the image on this seal, a heroic encounter in which the hero controls two creatures to either side of him by grasping their necks, has close ties once again to Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian glyptic (Garrison 2010). Finally, the carving of PFS 16* is characterized by plastic modeling and intricate detail, especially in the musculature of the lions, and has much in common specifically with the monumental tradition of Assyrian art (Garrison 1991: 8–9).

Whatever Parnakka's specific reasons were for selecting and commissioning these two seals, there are two things about his choice that are reasonably clear. The first is that he believed these seals were appropriate to his identity, as an ethnic Persian, as a member of the royal family, as the chief administrator at Persepolis, etc. The second is that he distinguished himself from the rest of the population of seal users at Persepolis through his selection of these decidedly Assyrianizing seals. Although there are numerous Assyrianizing features among the corpus of Persepolis seal impressions, Parnakka's seals still stand out among them. Apart from the Aramaic inscription PFS 9* could be taken for an actual Neo-Assyrian seal, and PFS 16* vividly evokes Assyrian palace reliefs in a manner unparalleled in Persepolitan glyptic. The distinctiveness of these seals was further enhanced by Parnakka's application of them. Nearly half of the preserved applications of PFS 16* show the entire scene, impressive given the large size of the seal (approximately 2.1 cm tall and 1 cm in diameter); PFS 9* was also usually rolled out completely (Garrison and Root 2001: 94, 406). The Aramaic inscriptions on these seals would also have distinguished Parnakka. Aramaic was the administrative language used most widely throughout the empire, whereas Old Persian and Elamite were presumably the main spoken and written languages, respectively, at Persepolis. So although there was also a significant population of people conversant in Aramaic there as well (as indicated by the Aramaic tablets in the Fortification Archive), these inscriptions linked Parnakka to the wider world of the empire as opposed to the local sphere of Persepolis.

But there are other aspects of Parnakka's identity that these seals communicate as well, albeit in a more subtle manner than his choice of imagery. The carving styles of

PFS 9* and 16* are Fortification Style and Persepolitan Modeled Style, respectively. These styles are modern categories developed as heuristic tools and were not necessarily recognized in antiquity; nevertheless, they are sufficiently distinctive from each other that their differences must result from deliberate choices rather than random variation. In the case of Parnakka, he would certainly have been aware of the differences in carving between his old seal and his new one, and though carving style was not the only factor under consideration when he commissioned these two seals it must have played a role in his decisions. With that in mind it is interesting that he chose seals carved in these particular styles. The Fortification Style, to which PFS 9* belongs, was the local carving style at Persepolis and was seemingly a descendent of Neo-Elamite glyptic traditions (Garrison and Root 2001: 18; Garrison 1991: 11–12; 2002). Fifty-one percent of the seals published in the first volume of *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets* belong this style, and this preponderance is representative of the corpus as a whole (Fig. 6; Garrison and Root 2001: 495).³ The heavily modeled carving of PFS 16* is much more distinctive than its inclusion in the Persepolitan Modeled Style, the second most frequently occurring style of carving at Persepolis, might indicate. But it also suggests that this seal was the work of a master carver who was the most accomplished exponent of a prevalent school of carving. The implication of these choices is that there was also some aspect of Parnakka's identity that associated him with the larger seal-using population at Persepolis, and he felt it appropriate to make this association manifest in some way. His selection of the heroic encounter motif for both seals also demonstrates similar connections. The heroic encounter is a frequent motif in early Achaemenid glyptic, yet there is enormous variety in its many iterations (Garrison and Root 2001; Garrison 2010: 165–68). Its popularity in this period may well have something to do with Darius' utilization of the motif on the royal name seals that bear trilingual inscriptions of his name. Garrison (forthcoming) argues that Darius presented these name seals as gifts to ranking Persepolis administrators without familial or political connections to him as a means of integrating them into the new regime. His use of the heroic encounter motif to accomplish this suggests that it had some significance as a symbol of unity or Persian group identity, perhaps in the same vein as Darius' representation of himself as an idealized "Persian man," and it resonated with many seal-users at Persepolis, including Parnakka himself.

Parnakka's seals permit us to reconstruct some of the social conditions at Persepolis in the years around 500 BCE. His seals feature distinctly Assyrianizing elements, Aramaic inscriptions, and elaborate carving that would have stood out to anyone who saw them. At the same time their carving style and motifs would have emphasized a degree of commonality and shared identity with most other seal users at Persepolis.

³ This is the first volume of the catalogue of seals preserved on the 2087 Elamite tablets published in Hallock 1969; two further volumes of these seals are forthcoming. The seals preserved on the Aramaic and uninscribed tablets are also under study; see the preliminary discussions in Dusinberre 2008 and Garrison 2008.

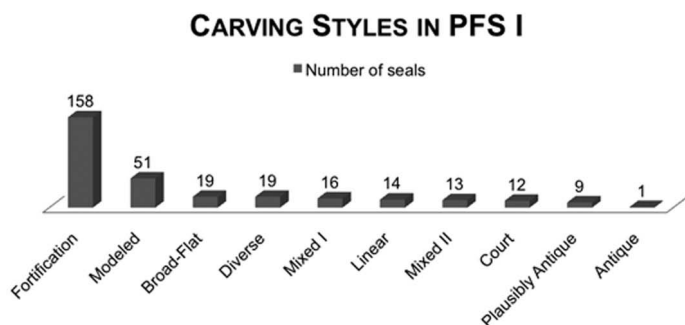


Figure 6: Carving styles in Volume One of *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*.

The selection of these features by Parnakka was the result of his belief that they were appropriate to his personality and high station, and the inclusion of features that created visual links with the seals of his subordinates provides a window onto the nature of society at Persepolis. Parnakka's seals also furnish a means of seeing how he viewed himself, and this is especially interesting in comparison with other imperial elites, such as Gobryas (PFS 857s; Gates 2002: 106) and Ašbazana (PFS 1567* and PTS 14*; Garrison 1998), whose seals indicate the different ways in which they conceived of themselves and their places in society and the empire. In this respect the seals of the Persepolis Fortification Archive are an invaluable source for understanding the social history of Persepolis in the time of Darius I.

Ptahhotep's Naophorous Statue

The final case study concerns Ptahhotep, a high-ranking official in Egypt during the fifth century BCE. He is known from an inscribed stela from the Serapeum at Saqqara, and from three unprovenanced items: a shabti figurine and the lid of his sarcophagus (both probably from Campbell's Tomb at Giza), and a statue now in the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 7). The inscriptions on these objects preserve Ptahhotep's titles, including overseer of the treasury and *kppš*, a Persian title that was reserved for the most eminent officials and administrators (Posener 1986); they also indicate that he gained this prominence in the reign of Darius I (Vittmann 2011: 390–92). Ptahhotep, then, was one of the individuals who served as a nexus between the apparatus of Achaemenid imperialism and local Egyptian networks of power. His statue provides a good opportunity for studying Ptahhotep's own conception of his personal identity, since it is quite literally a deliberate construction of that identity, a distillation of the essential features of his person intended to represent him for all eternity. As such, it can also provide valuable evidence for the social conditions at the satrapal court in Memphis in the first half of the fifth century.



Figure 7: Statue of Ptahhotep. Reproduced courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

The under life-size schist statue (Brooklyn Museum 37.353; Cooney 1953; Bothmer 1960: no. 64; Fazzini *et al.* 1989: no. 75; see Jansen-Winkel 1998: 163–68 for the inscription) depicts Ptahhotep holding a shrine. This statue type goes back to the beginning of the New Kingdom (c. 1550 BCE) and is reasonably common in the Late Period (664–332 BC). For those Egyptians wealthy enough to commission such a monument and influential enough to place it in a temple, this was a means of overcoming human mortality by residing in a god’s house for all eternity in the guise of Shu, the god who looked after Atum’s shrine and was thus the archetypal temple

priest (Klotz 2012). According to its inscription, Ptahhotep's statue was dedicated in the temple of Ptah in Memphis, a location appropriate to his career in government service at the provincial capital of Achaemenid Egypt and not too far removed from the site of his burial at Giza. The statue's significance and potency are rooted in the context of Egyptian cosmology and religion, and Ptahhotep's dedication of it demonstrates unequivocally his participation in Egyptian cultural and religious life.

But there are some features of this statue that attest to other aspects of Ptahhotep's identity, namely, the robe he wears (the so-called "Persian garment") and the torque around his neck. The Persian garment consists of a wraparound robe extending from the armpits to the ankles and secured with a distinctive fold at the front, and it often occurs (as in the case of Ptahhotep) with a v-neck sleeved jacket worn underneath it (Bothmer 1960: 75–76). There are two occurrences of it that clearly date to the preceding Saite dynasty (Bresciani 1967; Leahy 1984), which indicates that the garment, whatever its origin, was in use in Egypt prior to the advent of Achaemenid rule, but its (somewhat superficial) resemblance to Achaemenid court garb (Stronach 2011) is presumably what accounted for its popularity in personal monuments during the fifth century BCE.⁴ The torque, with its caprid protomes, is more explicitly Achaemenid in form. The ibex has a long history of representation in ancient Iranian art (Root 2002: 184–92), and it was a frequent motif on Achaemenid torques and bracelets, as attested on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis and in extant metal examples (see Rehm 1992: 31–38, 42–43, 65–69, 79–80, 86) (Fig. 8). The torque depicted on Ptahhotep's statue is clearly intended to be Achaemenid, and it may in fact be a reference to a royal gift from the Great King himself. The naophorous statue of Udjahorresnet, an older contemporary of Ptahhotep who served both Cambyses and Darius in various capacities, features a lion-headed bracelet of distinctly Achaemenid type, and the biographical inscription states that he received "ornaments of gold" from the king (Moyer 2006: 244–47). Whether or not Ptahhotep had in fact received the torque he is shown wearing as a similar mark of esteem from Darius, the adornment suggests this and creates a link with the Achaemenid rulers of Egypt.

Ptahhotep's statue neatly encapsulates the different components of the person he considered himself to be. His dedication of a naophorous statue, with an inscription asking for eternal sustenance from the living in the form of prayers and listing all his good and pious acts, is intelligible only in an Egyptian religious and cultural context. It shows not only a potentially very real concern for the afterlife but also Ptahhotep's cultivation of a relationship with a very important Egyptian institution, the temple of Ptah. At the same time he deliberately chose a statue in which he was represented with the clothing and ornaments of the elites who governed the Achaemenid Empire

4 A discussion of the Persian garment will be presented in greater detail in my forthcoming University of Michigan doctoral dissertation, provisionally entitled "The Archaeology of Achaemenid Rule in Egypt."



Figure 8: Gold bracelet from the Oxus Treasure. Reproduced courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

and with whom he thus identified himself. The statue was intended to address concerns that went far beyond the political conditions in Egypt during Ptahhotep's lifetime, and it is telling that he regarded these worldly accoutrements as an integral part of his personal identity. This statue also demonstrates very nicely how art in the empire, even within a conservative local tradition, was in dialogue with the art of the empire.

Conclusion: Achaemenid Art as Achaemenid History

Achaemenid art provides a wealth of evidence for writing the social history of the Achaemenid Empire. Art of the empire was designed in order to communicate ideological messages, and as such it attests to both the Great King's ideological goals and his expectations regarding what images and forms would evoke the desired response. Art in the empire was created and selected by the people of the empire based on their own constructed identities and individual worldviews, and as such it attests to the different ways these people interacted with each other and with the empire. In both

cases quotations of various artistic traditions are key to understanding the historical conditions informing the creation of a given object.

But the possibilities for using Achaemenid art to write history do not end there. Art also offers an avenue for engaging with broader historical discourses, such as addressing postcolonial concerns in the study of ancient imperialism. This is a somewhat delicate proposition in respect to Achaemenid historiography, since such concerns need to be balanced carefully against the orientalist prejudices that have informed scholarship on the empire for so long (Colburn 2011: 98–102). As the preceding case studies have shown, Darius, Parnakka, and Ptahhotep all experienced Achaemenid imperialism in different ways, and as a result, all of them made different decisions in respect to the art that each employed. This is not at all surprising, as each occupied a different social and political position within the empire. But the variety of their experiences shows the potential value of the study of Achaemenid art, as laid out in this essay, to examine the discrepant experiences had by the inhabitants of the Achaemenid Empire. Art provides access to the decisions made by individuals in imperial situations, permitting us to avoid generalized categories of Persians and subject peoples or oppressors and oppressed. In doing so it provides a means not only of better understanding the nature of Achaemenid imperialism, but also of placing this imperialism in dialogue with the study of other empires. And this is just one example of the many ways in which Achaemenid art contributes to our understanding of the ancient world.

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Additional Abbreviations

PFS = Seals preserved in the Persepolis Fortification Archive

PTS = Seals preserved in the Persepolis Treasury Archive

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Index

- *Baratkāma* 500
- *Čičavahuš* 487
- *Farnaka-* 486
- A. G. Leventis Foundation 207
- AB.ZU (*see also* Apsû) 744
- Aba 324
- absolute chronology 80
- Abu Shahrein (*see also* Eridu) 744
- abubu, flood 588
- accounting office 508
- accounting official 508
- accounts 494, 505
- Achaemenid art 472, 488, 502
 - glyptic 490
 - iconography 589
- Achaemenid/Achaemenian period 34, 36, 42–43, 48–49, 324, 453, 472
- Adab 187, 190, 197–198
- Adad 623
- Adad-Guppi 334
- administration 185–186, 194–200
- adornment 133–134, 149
- Aegean 80, 82, 84–86, 88, 91–93, 98, 101, 208, 211
- Aeschylus 94
- aesthetics 135, 138–139, 151, 267–268, 271
- agate 272
- agency 133, 148–149, 151, 241, 250, 254, 258–259, 597–598, 601, 613
- Akaki 206, 227–228
- akītu* house 588
- Akkadian period 185–189, 191–195, 197, 199–200, 273, 282–283, 287, 319–338, 372–373, 377, 570, 573
- Akkadian language/terms 210–211, 265, 285, 379–381, 386
- alabaster (panels) 272, 278, 280, 284
- Alalakh 55–56, 58–61, 64–65, 67–70, 72–73, 75, 241, 255
- Alassa 206, 221–222
- Alexander the Great 452–453, 454, 473
- el-Amarna, Tel 209
- Ama'ushumgal 558
- amethyst 272
- amparabaraš* 494
- amulet, Lamasthu Amulet 274, 277
- An 380–381
- Ana-Sin-taklaku, official in Mari 582
- Anatolia 81, 92, 205, 207–208, 211, 321
- Anšan 490, 747, 756
- anthropomorphic 282–283, 287
- Anzan 488
- Anzanite 488
- anzu* 574, 585–586
- apotropaion 287
- apparnabara* 494
- applied Art 267
- Apsû (*see also* AB.ZU) 381–382, 744, 746
- Aramaic 775, 779, 788–790
 - language 483, 503, 505, 506
- Arbela 690
- archaeological/archaeology 205–207, 212
- archives 197–198, 269
- Ardumaniš 497
- Aristotle 245
- army 621–622, 627, 630–631
- army commander 500
- Arnheim, Rudolf 163–164, 172–173
- Aršāma 492, 496–497, 505–506
- art 265–269, 271–272, 274–275, 278–280
- Artavardiya 487
- artifact 267
- artisans 80, 88, 92–93, 98, 100, 265, 268–270, 287
- artists 133, 147–148, 265–271, 284
- artwork 265–268, 270–272, 274, 276, 278–282
- Artystone 492
- Aruru 381
- Ašbazana 487, 491–493, 497–498, 500, 505–506, 508, 791
- al-Aseel, Naji 27
- Asmar, Tell 197, 322, 549, 581–582, 645–650, 652–6620
- Abu Temple 645–662
- sculpture hoard 645–646, 653, 657, 660–661
- Aspačanā 487
- Aspathines 487, 497
- Assur (city) 377, 584, 588, 626, 689–690, 693, 717–718
- Old Palace 689
- Assur (god) 585–589, 619, 622–623, 631, 636, 638, 727–728, 746, 759–760

- Assurbanipal 258, 334–336, 345–349, 352–355,
358–361, 363–365, 392, 395, 397, 401–
402, 411, 515, 526, 528, 530–531, 534, 589,
692, 719, 728
library 707
Assur-bel-kala 405, 586
Assurnasirpal II 253, 332–333, 345–346,
351–352, 358, 362–364, 392, 515, 520,
531, 534, 538, 585–586, 622, 624–627,
629, 690, 692–693, 702, 716, 718, 724,
731, 733–734
Assur-resh-ishi I 693
Assur-šarrat 334
Assyria 276, 488, 515–516, 519–526, 528,
530–538, 619–623, 631, 637, 713–722,
724–725, 727, 731–734
Assyrian empire 515, 537–538
Assyrianization 100, 708
Assyrianizing 500, 503, 505, 507–508
Athens 89, 91, 94
Atossa 492
Atra-ḫasis 379–383
Azzawi, Dia 18
- Baba 557
bābānu 701
Babylon (city) 15, 27, 28, 336, 453–457, 466,
761
Babylon, first dynasty 583
Babylonia 322, 373, 379, 385, 451–454,
456–458, 465, 469–471, 473, 475, 488,
528–531, 538, 625–626, 632, 636–637
Bactria 486
bag closures 483
Bagabuxša 497
Baghdad 16, 24
Bakadada 493
Balawat 620–621, 624, 629–631, 718, 725–726,
729, 731–732, 746
bandaka 500
banqueting 92–93, 100, 669–670, 676, 684
banqueting scene 669–670, 676–677, 679–
680, 684–685
banû 395, 409
Baqir, Taha 19, 28
Baradkama 500, 502
Barsip 325
Barthes, Roland 247
basalt 271
basin 669, 671, 677–679, 681–684
Bassetki statue 605–606, 610
inscription 573
baton 502
Batrakataš 483
Bavian, inscription (*see also* Khinis-Bavian)
588
Bēlet-ilī 381
Bell, Gertrude 16, 26, 27
bētānu 701
bird 224
bird of prey 217
Birkleyn caves 745–746
Bisotūn 497, 500, 507
bīt kutalli 693
body and embodiment 422, 425, 429, 436,
443–444
body gesture 571, 580
booty 98, 100
bow and arrow 498, 502
box closures 483
Brak, Tell 198, 200
British Museum, London 208, 219, 222
bronzes 86
bronze-working (copper-working) 214, 229
bucranium 218, 220–221, 224, 227
bull-man 273, 283, 286
bulls 218, 220–222, 224–225, 227, 229, 502
Burak, Tall 55, 66, 69–71, 73, 75
bureaucrats 268, 507
- Canaanite 378, 384
canon 133–134, 136, 138–139, 142–144, 146,
148, 151
carnelian 272, 276, 278
Çatal Hüyük 51
cattle chief 500
cattle 635
cedar 728, 730
Cesnola, Luigi Palma di 207
chaîne opératoire 781
chaos 283–285
chariot 622–625, 627, 629–630, 633
chief of workers 492
city-god 573
clay 265, 270, 272–276, 278
Collon, Dominique 146
combat 222, 224, 227–229
connoisseurship 267

- conspicuous consumption 273, 279
 conspiracy of the Seven 497
 consumption 271, 278
 contest Scene 282–283, 285–286
 contest seals 573
 copper 272
 Corinth 91
 cosmology 713
 court 266, 269–271
 court-centric iconography 501–502, 506
 Court Style 501–502, 506–508
 craft(s) 133–134, 137, 147, 267, 269
 craft specialists 269
 creolization 95
 Crete 79–80, 85–86, 88, 91–92
 crocodile 630
 Cruciform Monument 335–337
 cuneiform 210, 257–258, 271
 Cuthaeen Legend of Naram-Sin 329
 cylinder seals (*see also* seals) 138–139,
 142–146, 151, 185, 187, 189–191, 193–194,
 196–197, 205–206, 210, 230, 271–272,
 275–276, 278–279, 282–283, 304–306
 Cypriot art 205–230
 Cypriot syllabic 210
 Cypro-Minoan 209–210, 227
 Cyprus 80, 84–85, 97, 100, 205–230
 Cyprus Museum, Nicosia 208
 Cyrus 490

 Dadush, Stele of 581
 Daidalic 91
 damanna 493–495, 500, 508
damqu 409
 Darius 481, 483, 487, 490, 496–498, 501,
 506, 775–776, 779–780, 784–788, 790–
 791, 793, 795
 date palm 502, 506
 Datukka 493
 decoration 137, 141, 144
 decorative program 269
 Deh-e Now 761
 delivery man 494
 Delphi 91, 209
 dentate crown 502
 Department of Antiquities of Cyprus 207, 214,
 221–222, 227
 Deuteronomy 242–243
^dGAL 756–757

 Dikaios, Porphyrios 223
 Dimirji, Muayad Said 29
dingir 570–571, 573, 583, 585
 disk and crescent 216
 divination 632
 Diyala 378
 Diyarbakir stele 605, 608–610
 door colossi (*see also* *lamassu*) 690
 Dorak 50
 dress 424–426
 al-Droubi, Hafith 17
 Dumuzi 557–559
 Dumuzi-Inana A 559
 Dumuzi-Inanna love lyrics 397
 Dur Sharruken/Sharrukin (Khosabad) 472, 482,
 516, 525, 620, 631, 718, 728–730
 Royal Palace 689, 692, 697–701, 704–707
 Palace F (Military Palace/Review
 Palace) 693, 697
 Residence K 693
 Dynasty of Akkade 185, 187, 200

 Ea 381–382, 756, 759
 eagle 629–630
 Eanatum/Eannatum, ruler of Lagash 332, 572,
 575, 578, 589
 Early Dynastic period 185, 189, 191, 194, 276,
 278–279, 281–282, 386, 421–424, 547,
 549, 551, 553–556, 558, 560–564, 572, 581,
 599–600, 645–662
 City states of: Ur, Kish, Mari, Nippur, Abu
 Salabikh, Khafajah, Lagash 421–424,
 426–435
 rulers (kings, queens) 426, 440, 444
 Early Dynastic statues 600, 612–613
 Ebla 669–670, 676–677, 679–680, 684–685
 Egypt 205, 207–208, 210–211, 216–217, 228,
 321, 528, 530, 546–547, 557, 560, 632, 775,
 777–779, 784, 787–788, 791–794
 Egyptian 79–80, 83–86, 88, 90–92, 97–98,
 100
ekal māšarti 693
 ekphrasis 244–245
 Elam 486, 488, 490
 Elamite 778, 787, 790
 Elamite language 483, 486, 488, 491, 493,
 497–498, 508, 775, 778, 787, 789–790
 elephant 630
 Eleutherna 92

- elite (classes) 268, 272
 EN 554–555
 encounter 205–206
 engur 746
 Enki 379, 382, 623, 744, 756, 759–760
Enki and Ninhursaga 382
Enki and Ninmah 382
 Enkidu 327, 333, 381, 575, 583, 627
 Enkomi 206, 222–227
 Enlightenment 267
 Enlil 380–381, 583
Enuma elish 270, 285–286
 Enzag 756
 Epic of Creation 623, 636
 Episkopi 206, 218–222, 224, 226
 Eridu (see also Abu Shahrein) 381, 744, 760
 Esarhaddon 402, 411, 629–630, 637, 692, 699, 719
 Eshnuna/Eshnunna (see Asmar, Tell) 581–582
 estate 483, 496–497
 Etana, king of Kish 575
eṭemmu, narû, ṣalmu (alan) 333–334
 ethnicity 55, 515–519, 535–538
etira 494–495
 Etruscan, Etruscans 79, 82, 86, 93
 Euboian 81, 93
 Euphrates River 285, 627, 744–745
 Euripedes 94
 Europe 267
 Evans, Arthur 51

 Fahliyān 486, 492
 Fahliyān River 741, 747, 758, 761
 faience 208, 229, 276
 falconry 217
 Fārs 486, 490, 496
 fashion and fashion trends 424–426, 430–431, 433, 435–445
 favissae 670–671, 675
 Feldman, Marian 137–138, 144, 146–147, 149, 152
 figure in the winged disk 502
 figurines 272–273, 275
 fine art 267
 flower 502
 forgeries
 background of 31
 curators 32, 40–42, 45–47, 49
 dealers 31, 33–34, 37–38, 40, 44, 46–48
 detection 39
 private collectors 31
 Fortification Style 504, 788, 790
 fortress 492
 Frankfort, Henri 97, 138–144, 148, 648, 656
 fresco technique 55, 60–61, 66, 68–69, 74
 fruit handler 494

 al-Gailani, Abdulrahman 18
 Gasur 197–198
 gatepost 606–607
 Gaubaruva 491, 497
 Gell, Alfred 250, 254, 600–601, 611, 614
 gender 426–430
 Ghanima, Youssif 27
 Ghirshman, Roman 36, 46–48
 gifts 598, 601, 605, 610–613
 Gilgamesh 278, 281, 285, 287, 319, 326–328, 333, 381, 627
 Gilgamesh Epic 19, 333, 396, 403–404, 409
 Gilgamesh Epic, image 575
 Girsu (see Tello) 557, 561
^{GIS}GEŠTIN^{MES} *kutira* 494
 glyptic 139, 141, 143–144, 481–482, 487–488, 490, 495, 500, 504–508
 Gobryas 491, 497, 791
 god(s)/goddess(es) 266, 268, 270–271, 273, 279–280, 283–286, 431, 434
 godlike king 569, 582, 588, 590
 gold rings 214, 216
 gold 272, 430–431, 433–435, 437–443
 Goodman, Nelson 247–249
 Gordion 782–783
 Gorgoneion 287
 grain handler 494
 Great King 481, 487, 506
 Greece 79–82, 84–86, 90, 97, 207–209, 229–230, 268
 Greek art 79, 84, 88, 90, 96–98
 Greek language 210–211, 483
 griffin 218–222, 224–225, 227–229, 286
 Gudea 43, 279, 382–383
 Gudea, Statue N 576
 Gula 584
 gypsum 271

 Hacilar 38, 41–42
 Hala Sultan Tekke 206, 223

- halik ume 765
halmi 493–495, 505
 Hama 80, 92
 Hamath 631
hamišiya 494
 Hammurabi 378, 583
 Law Code Stele of 583
 Harran 334
 Harrena 500, 502
 Hasanlu 34–35, 48, 482
 Haturdada 493
haturmakša 494–495
hé.gal/*hegallu* plenty, abundance 576
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 244
 heirloom seal 488, 497, 500, 507
 Hellenistic 451–460, 463, 465, 469–475
 Herakles 455, 461, 465, 469–474
 Hero with curls (aka Nude Hero) 273–274, 283, 286
 Herodotus 64, 487, 497, 779
 hierarchy 217, 228–229
 Hittite 217
 Hodder, Ian 145
 Homer 93, 95
 homology 571–572, 580, 583, 586
 Horace 245
 horned headdress 576
 house (royal) 497
 human-faced bull 502
 human-headed bull 502
 Humbaba (see Huwawa)
 Humbar 756
 hunting 220–222, 224, 229
 al-Husri, Sati' 17, 24, 25, 26, 27
 Hussein, Saddam 15, 16, 20
 Huwawa/Humbaba 278, 285–287, 326–327, 575, 580–581
 hybridity 95, 208–209
 Hydarnes 497

 Ibbi-Sin 580
 icon/iconic 265, 272, 280, 282–283, 285–286
 icon parodies 243
 Iddin-Sin, king of Simurru 579–580
 identity 133, 148–149, 151, 773, 778, 781–782, 789–791, 793–794
 ideology 271, 273, 773, 779, 784, 786–787
 idol(atry) 242
 Idrimi 241, 251, 255–258

 image 265–266, 268, 270–272, 274, 278–287
 Inana/Inanna (see also Ishtar) 377, 386, 550–562, 572, 583, 623
 Inanna's Descent 397
 incantation 274, 279
 India 486
 inlays 429–430, 434
 Inšušinak 756–757
 intaglio 276
 Intaphernes 497
 Ionians 98
 Iran 80–81, 83, 95, 97–98, 208, 550
 Iraq 34, 48, 207
 Iraq Museum 18, 26, 29
 Irdabama 489, 496, 500
 Irdumartiya 487, 492–493, 500, 502
 Iron Age 160, 177, 205–206, 208–210, 214–217, 230
 Iršama 492, 496–497, 500
 Iršena 486, 492–493
 Irtašduna 492, 496–497, 500, 505–506
 Irtuppiya 486
 Isaiah 242–243
 Ishtar 373, 377, 396–399, 405, 407, 573, 582–584, 589, 624, 629, 669–674, 677–679, 681, 683–685
 Ishtar's Descent 396–397, 407
 Ishtar Gate 16
 Isin 328, 557
 Isin-Larsa period 373, 377, 384, 580, 583
išippu, priest 585
 Israel (ancient) 242–243
iššakku, representative, administrator 585, 589
 Italy 79–81, 84, 86, 93, 97, 207–208
 ivory/ivories 79–80, 83, 85–86, 91, 98, 133, 138, 144, 148, 150, 217, 229
 Izeh 755

 Jemdet Nasr Period 276, 278
 Jeremiah 243
 Jerusalem 619, 628
 jewelry 134, 138–139, 141, 143, 146, 148, 272, 276
 Jin-Jin 747–748, 756
 journals 494, 505
 Kabri, Tel 55, 66, 68, 71–72, 74–75
 Kalḫu (Calah) (see Nimrud)
 Kambarma 491–492, 495, 497–498, 500

- Kāmfirūz 486, 492
 Kant, Immanuel 244–245
kapnuškira 492–493
 Karageorghis, Vassos 207–209, 227
 Karkemish 521, 533
 Karkiš 486, 492–493
 Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta 689–690
kasabattiš 500
 Kassite 328, 549
 Keš 383
 Khafajah 600
 Khinis-Bavian 586–587
 Khorsabad (see Dur Sharrukin)
 Khūzestān 486, 490
 Ki 381
 king 268–269, 271, 279–281, 283–285,
 488–490, 492–493, 496, 498, 506–507
 Accessibility 697, 700–701
 Bedroom 698
 ‘king with the mace’ 580
 archetypal 571, 575, 588, 590–591
 Kiririša 756
 Kish 197
 Kition 206, 212–217, 221–224, 226–227,
 229–230
 Knossos 85, 92
 Kommos 85, 92
 Kourion 206, 218–222, 224–225, 227, 229
 Kouris River (river of Cyprus) 219, 221–222
Kūbu/kūbu 383–384
 kudurru 612
 Kufa, Khan Mirjan 26
 Kūh-e Pātāwēh 747, 750, 758, 760
 kukunnum 760–761
 Kul-e Farah 755
 Kurangun 741–742, 747–748, 750–752,
 755–758, 760–762, 764–765
 Kuraš 488
kurdabattiš 492–493
 kurman 494
kurtaš 492
 Kutha 556
kuzbu; hi-li 386, 409

 Lachish 526–527, 588, 624, 629, 707
 Lagash, city-state of 575, 578, 651–652, 655,
 659
laḥmu, naked, girdled figure with six curls 575
 lama 570, 576, 590

 Lamashtu, Lamashtu amulets 274, 277
lamassu (see also door colossi) 272, 280
 lance-bearer 498
 landscape 516–517, 519, 525–528, 530–531,
 534, 713–720, 722, 724, 726–728, 730–735
 lapis lazuli 272, 276, 285
 Late Bronze Age 85, 90, 96, 160, 169, 177, 180,
 205–230, 373, 380, 533
 Late Uruk 549–550, 552–555, 559–562
 lead 272
 leather (works) 272
 Lefkandi 85
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim 243, 245–246
 Letter of Ludingira to his Mother 397
 letter-order 487, 493–494, 497, 504, 508
 Levant 79–81, 84–85, 90–93, 97, 208, 211,
 224, 393–395, 397
 lexical lists/texts 295–297, 299–303, 308–309,
 313–314
 Liballi-sharrat 397, 401–402, 411
 limestone 271, 279
 liminality 603, 606–609, 612
 Linear B 211
 lion hunt 345, 347, 349, 352–354, 356–359,
 361, 364
 lion, combat 575
 lions 218, 222, 225, 227, 502, 624, 626, 629
lipte-bearer 498, 505
 Literacy 265–266, 270–271, 274, 276, 278, 280,
 285
 Liyan (Tol-e Peytul) 761
 Lugal-Anda 192
 Luristan 34, 48
 Luther, Martin 244
 Lydia, Lydians 84, 91, 96

 mace 624, 627
Machtkunst 265, 269
 Madurai 558
 Mālamir 755
 Malta 588
 Mamasani 741, 747
 Mami 379–381
 Manios 44
 Manishtushu 187, 192, 198, 322, 328, 335
 manufacturing (skill) 267
mār ummēnim 268
 Marcus Aurelius 332
 March, Werner 26

- Marduk 586
 Mari 268–269, 322, 334, 580, 582
 Marlik 34–35, 38, 41, 49
 Maroni 206, 223
 mass production 265, 268, 270, 272, 282, 286
 master or mistress of animals 208, 213, 216
 Matannan 497
 material culture 133, 144–147, 149
 Mauss, Marcel 600
 Mediterranean 620, 627
 Megabyzus 497
melammu; *me-lám* 408, 583
 Mellaart, James 49–51
 memoranda 486, 505
 memory 280
 Mesopotamia 208, 210–211, 319–321, 324–326,
 328, 331–334, 371–372, 381, 384, 545–550,
 552, 555, 557, 559–560, 564
 metal 133, 140–141, 143, 148, 150
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 207
 miniature 272, 275–276, 283
 Minoan 208
 minor arts 133, 136–139, 147–149, 151
 mirror neurons 249
 Mišparma 493
 Mitanni 276
 Modeled Style 502, 504–505, 788, 790
 mold-made 268, 272
 monster 266, 273, 278, 284–287
 monumental architecture 271
 monumental art 133, 147, 150
 monuments 266, 271–272, 278, 280
 Moortgat, Anton 140–141, 143–144
 Morphou 206, 227
 Moscati, Sabatino 159–160
 mud 272
 mudbrick 271–272
 Mukanišum, official in Mari 580, 582
 Mulissu 399, 407
 Munbaqa, Tell 380
mušhuššu 285
 music 669–670, 673, 675, 677, 685
 musical performance 669–670, 673, 675, 677,
 685
 Al-Mustansiriya 25
 Mycenaean 208, 211
 Myron 268
 Myth of Enlil and Sud 392, 396–397
 Myth of Nabu and Tashmetu 396–397, 407, 409
 Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal 396, 409
 mythology 251, 265, 270
 narratives 265–266, 270–271, 283
 Nabonidus 334–338
 Nabopolassar 336
 Nabu 761
 Nabu-apla-iddina 336
 Naked bearded hero 606–610
 Nammu 381
 Nana/Nanna 557, 578
 Nanše/Nanshe 557, 575
 Napiriša 756–757
 Naqia/Zakutu 396, 402, 405, 407, 411
 Naqš-e Rostam/Naqsh-e Rostam 498, 507,
 756
 Naram-Sin 187, 192, 198–200, 320, 322–324,
 327–329, 333–335, 385–386, 549,
 569–570, 573, 575, 579, 585, 590, 744–745
 Victory Stele 575, 579, 602, 605–608,
 611
Narezzaš 483
 narrative 620–621, 624–626, 631, 633, 636
 Autonomous 281, 285
 Pictorial 265–266, 280
 narû 321, 329, 334–335
 natural resources 271
 Naucratis 209
 Nebuchadnezzar I 336
 Nebuchadnezzar II 15, 16, 20
 Neo-Assyrian 320, 325–326, 329, 331–333,
 335–336, 392–399, 403–412, 472, 571,
 575–576, 585, 589
 Empire 82, 96–97, 101
 wall reliefs 253
 Neo-Babylonian 322, 329, 332, 334–336
 Neo-Babylonian Empire 266, 284
 Neo-Elamite 741, 755–756
 Neolithic 208, 384, 551
 Nergal 623
 Nigin 557
 Nimrud 27, 28, 80, 87–88, 141, 145, 148–149,
 284, 345–346, 350, 352, 362–364, 393,
 395, 400–410, 482, 516, 521, 585–587,
 689–694, 696–699, 701–702, 706, 708,
 718, 724, 733, 746
 Central Palace 630, 634, 637
 Military Palace (Arsenal/Review Palace/Fort
 Shalmaneser) 693, 694–697, 698, 702

- Northwest Palace 345–346, 350, 352, 363–364, 395, 586, 622–624, 626, 629–630, 689–692, 697–698, 701–705, 707–708
 Southwest Palace 692, 699
 Town Wall Palace 696
- Nindara 557
- Nineveh 345, 347, 349, 353–354, 356–357, 359–361, 392, 394–395, 398, 401, 405, 407, 482, 516, 526, 585–586, 588, 689–690, 692–693, 695, 698–699, 701–703, 706, 708, 717, 719, 727, 733, 734
 Military Palace (*bīt kutalli*/Review Palace/
 Nebi Yunus) 693
 North Palace 345, 347, 349, 352, 354, 356–357, 359, 361, 401, 411, 629, 632, 692, 695, 699, 702, 708
 Southwest Palace 392, 588, 625, 628, 631–633, 635, 689, 692, 698–699, 701–704, 706–708
- Ningal 557, 578
- Ningirsu 562–563, 572, 576, 589, 759–760
- Ningishzida 279
- Ninhursag 572
- Ninhursaga 382–383
- Ninlil 586, 588
- Ninšubur 379
- Nintu 379, 384
- Ninurta 284–285, 585–586, 589
- Nippur 194, 197, 322, 381, 455, 457, 461, 466, 556, 558
 Inanna Temple 655, 661
- Nīrīz 483
- Northern Mesopotamia 272
- ‘nude belted hero’ 465, 472
- numerical tablets 298–299, 306–309, 311–312
- Nur-Adad 334
- occupation 431–435, 438–439
- offering table (bull-legged) 677–681, 684–685
- official art 266, 269–270, 272, 274, 278, 280
- Ohnefalsch-Richter, Max 207
- Old Akkadian Period 282–283, 546–549, 551, 562–563
- Old Assyrian 324
- Old Babylonian Period 217, 272–275, 286, 322, 325, 327, 330, 333–335, 337, 373, 377, 383, 549
- Old Elamite 757
- Old Persian language 483, 508
- Olympia 91
- oral 265–266, 270, 282, 285, 287
- oral mythology, traditional tales 266, 270
- order (and chaos) 283
- Orientalism 55, 63, 65, 79, 82–83, 94–96
- Orientalization 79, 84, 94, 96
- Orientalizing 79–80, 82–86, 88, 90–94, 96–98
- Otanes 497
- Oxus 36
- palace workers 268
- palatial spaces
 palatial spaces, bathroom 693, 697–698, 704
 palatial spaces, bedroom 698, 705, 707
 palatial spaces, corridor 697, 701–702, 704–707, 709
 palatial spaces, ramp/staircase 694, 697
 palatial spaces, throneroom 692–694, 696–697, 701, 704
- paleography 296, 298–299
- Panofsky, Erwin 246–247
- paradises 483
- Parnaka (Parnakka) 486–487, 491–494, 496, 500, 502–507, 788–791, 795
- Parša* 483, 487, 492
- Parthian 384, 453–455, 470
- Parthian conquest 453
- Parthians 95
- Partible person 597, 601–602, 613–614
- Pasargadae 483
- pattern book, sketch book 265, 269, 282
- Pattišmarriš* 498
- peg figurine(s) 577
- Peirce, Charles Sanders 246–247
- performance 669–670, 673, 675, 677, 683, 685
- performative 619, 636–638
- Persepolis 472, 481–486, 488, 491–492, 495–496, 500, 507, 774, 778–780, 782, 784, 786–791, 793
- Persepolis Fortification archive 481–483, 485–493, 495–497, 500, 505, 508, 774, 778, 780, 788, 790–791
- Persepolis Treasury archive 483, 487, 492, 500, 502, 507–508
- Persepolis Treasury archive, seals 483, 502
- Persepolitan glyptic 488, 490, 500, 504, 789
- Persia 209
- Persian Court robe 501–502

- Persian Gulf 620
 Persian Wars 82, 90
 personal ornament 272, 276
 PFS 1* 486, 492–493
 PFS 2 486
 PFS 3 486, 492
 PFS 4* 486, 492
 PFS 9* 496, 503–506, 788–790
 PFS 11* 500–501, 503–506
 PFS 16* 487, 496–497, 500, 504–506, 508, 788–790
 PFS 30 486, 492
 PFS 32* 493, 495
 PFS 38 496, 498, 500, 505
 PFS 51 488, 490, 496, 500
 PFS 71* 502, 504
 PFS 83* 502–506
 PFS 93* 488–489, 500
 PFS 113* 501–503
 PFS 857s 500–501, 791
 PFS 1567* 500–501, 505, 508, 791
 PFS 1568* 500, 502, 505
 PFS 2899* 497, 499–500
 Pheidias 268
 Phoenician 79–80, 83–88, 91–93, 95–98, 208, 217
 Phrygia 80, 96
 Phrygian language 483
 pictographic tablets 307–309, 312
 pictorial narrative (*see* narrative)
 Pir Hüssein 549
 Pithekoussai 81, 93
 pithoi 227
 plaques
 clay 270, 272
 of Ur-Nanshe 279
 terracotta 275, 282, 286–287
 Plato 245
 Plutarch 244
 political 267, 276
 popular art
 domestic 266, 270, 272
 personal 272, 275
 Pope, A. U. 36, 47
 Populonia 93
 Porada, Edith 144, 152, 227, 229
 portable art 133–134, 137, 139, 141, 145–152
 portrait 279, 286, 631–632
 Portugal 85
 Post-Akkadian Period 282
 postcolonial 79, 82, 95–96
 post-station 486
 practice theory 295, 297, 314
 Praxiteles 268
 prestige, prestige goods 272, 276
 priest 623, 625
 prince of the house 497
 production processes 271
 Protestant Reformation 244
 Protoattic 91
 Protocorinthian 81, 91
 Psalms 583
 Pseudo-Writing 274
 PTS 4* 502
 PTS 14* 508, 791
 PTS 33* 502
 Puzur-Ishtar 580

 Qatna 55, 66, 69, 72–73, 149
 Quarrying 272
 quiver 502

 al-Rahal, Khalid 17, 19, 22
 Rām Hormoz 486
 recarving 205–207, 210–230
 reception 267, 271, 278, 282
 regional director 486–487, 492–494
 reliefs 515–516, 520–526, 528, 530–533
 religious 267–268, 273, 281, 287
 Renaissance 268
 Rim-Sin 570, 583
 Rimush 187, 192, 198, 322
 rings 210–211, 216
 ritual 669–672, 675–677, 679–680, 683–685, 713–714, 719–727, 729–733, 735
 Roman 332
 Rome 95
 Royal Cemetery at Ur (*see* Ur)
 royal-name inscription 501–502, 506
 royal road 482–483, 486
 Rudkhaneh-e Fahliyān River 758

 sacred space 669–670, 683–635
 sacred tree 351–352, 362–364
 sacrifice 720, 722, 725, 729
 Said, Edward 79, 82, 94–95
 Sakka, Tall 55, 66, 71, 73
 šakkanakku, governor, period in Mari 580

- šaknu*, representative, administrator 585, 589
šaladin 19
šalam šarri, royal image 571, 585
 Salim, Jawad 17, 28
šalmu, image 583
 Samarra 26
Šamaš (see Shamash)
 Samos 91
šaramanna 493–495, 500, 508
 Sardinia 85, 93
 Sardis 486, 781
 Sargon II (Assyria) 320, 332, 525–526, 535–536, 586, 625, 692–693, 697–700, 704–707, 718, 726
 Sargon (Akkad) 187, 192, 198, 320, 322, 324, 327–329, 332–334, 336–338
 Stele of 572–573, 589
 Sasa, queen of Lagash 651
 Sasanian 36
 Sasanians 95
 de Saussure, Ferdinand 246
 scarabs 209–210, 214
 Schaeffer, Claude 223
 scribes
 lore 270, 285
 training 266, 270–271
 sculptors 268
 ŠE 554, 562
 sealing practices 185–186, 193–194, 199–200
 seals (see also cylinder seals and stamp seals)
 205–206, 208, 230, 481, 483, 486–496, 500–508, 774, 778, 780, 782–783, 788–791
 seal of Marduk 285
 stamp Seals 276
 second story 694–695
šedu (**udug**) (see also UDUG) 328
 Seleucia-on-the-Tigris 453, 455–457, 465, 467, 470–471, 473
 Seleucid 453, 470–471, 473
 Seleucus 453
 Seleucus I 453
 semiotics 245–247
 Semon 209
 Sennacherib 349, 352, 363, 391, 402, 526, 535–536, 584, 586–588, 619, 624–625, 627, 628–629, 631, 635, 692–693, 704–706, 719
 Šešpeš 488
 Shalmaneser III 351, 363, 522, 534–535, 538, 585, 630–631, 718, 724–725, 745–746
 Shamash 324, 335–336, 583, 623
 Shamshi-Adad 322, 334
 Sharkalisharri 187, 192, 199–200
 Sharruwa 256, 258
 Shuba'd (queen) 17
 Shulgi 324
 Shulgi X (hymn) 558
 Shutruk-Nahhunte I 322
 Sicily 93
 siege 620, 624, 628–631, 634
 Šilhak-Inšušinak 748
 silver 272
 Simonides 244
 Simurru 579
 Sin 336, 579, 583
 Sinda 229
 Sin-iddinam 334, 378
 Sippar 322, 335, 337–338
 Šīrāz 483
 Sister Arts 244
 slaves 269, 276
 smiths 268
 social 267–269, 271, 281, 286
 social context 614
 socioeconomic 267, 269
 southern Mesopotamia 271
 Spain 85–86
 splayed beard 580–581
 staff (administration) 487, 492, 507
 staff (object) 502
 stamp seals (see also seals) 210–211, 219–221, 230, 304–305
 star 503
 statuary/statues 424, 428–429, 598–601, 605–606, 608, 611–614, 779
 Akkadian 599
 as kudurrus 612
 Bassetki 607–608
 Early Dynastic 599–600, 612–613
 Naram-Sin 609
 votive 599–600
 stelae 599, 601, 605, 610, 612, 614
 Stele of Ishtar 669, 671–677, 683–684
 Stele of the Vultures 21, 252, 279, 281, 572
 storehouse 483, 494
 storekeeper 494
 Strathern, Marilyn 597–598, 600–601, 611, 614

- Strommenger, Eva 140–144
 structuralism 247
 Šuddayauda 486, 492–493, 495
 Sumer 187, 197, 200
 Sumerian 265, 283
 Sumerian king list 570
Šumma izbu 383
 sun disk 216, 224
 supply office 508
 Susa 197–198, 200, 323, 328, 486, 507, 549,
 573, 747, 759–761, 778–779, 784–787,
 791–794
 Susiana 486
 Swedish Cyprus Expedition 207, 222–223
 sword 624
 Syria 80, 83, 85–86, 91–92, 97–98, 207–208,
 210–211, 321, 520, 524, 533, 538

 Tal-e Malyan 747, 755
tamšīlu, likeness 585–586
 Tan-Uli and Kuk-Našur II 755
 Tarbišu 699
tarmu-grain 497
 Tarsus 81
 Tashmetum-sharrat 707–708
 Tayinat, Tell/Kunalia 241, 258
 Tchoga Zanbil 757, 761, 765
 technical mastery 268–269
 Teispes 488
 Teispid house 490, 497
 Tello (ancient Girsu) 187, 192–193, 197–198,
 557, 561, 576–578, 760
 Construction Inférieure 655
 e₂-mi₂ archive 651–652, 655
 Temple, Early Dynastic 649–656
 terracotta 139, 141, 150
 figurine(s) 580
 Teumman 627, 629, 632–634, 636–638
 text 265–266, 269, 271, 274, 278–279, 281
 textiles 209, 211, 229, 272
The Creation of the Pickax 381
 Thebes (Boeotia, Greece) 229
 therianthropic 282
 theriomorphic 282
 things 205–206
 throne 217
 Thutmose (Egyptian sculptor) 209
 Tiamat 270, 285–286, 327, 586, 588
 Tiglath-pileser I 584, 690, 693, 745, 760
 Tiglath-pileser III 253, 523, 534, 538, 625,
 629–630, 637, 692, 717–718
 Tigris River 285, 744–746
 Tigris tunnel 745
 Til-Tuba 348–350, 626–627, 631–633, 636
 Til-Tuba (the battle of) 348–350
Tirazziš 483
 Titus 332
 tokens 303–304, 306, 311
 trampling stance 579–580
 transculturation 95
 treasurer 492–493, 500, 508
 treasures 483
 tree 216, 218–222, 224–227, 228–229
 tribute 98, 100
 Trojans 95–96
 Troodos Mountains (region of Cyprus) 221, 227
 Troy 209
 Tukulti-Ninurta I 347, 364, 583–584, 589,
 689–690
tumara 494–495
 Tummal 557–558

 UDUG/šedu (*see also* sedu) 580
 Udusana 492, 496
 Ugarit 210
 Ugaritic 210
uhli 497
ukbahamišiya 494
ullira 494–495
 Umm el-Jir 196–197
 Umma 557, 561
 University of Cincinnati 219
 University of Pennsylvania 219
 Untaš-Napiriša 757
 Ur 322, 482, 554, 557, 570, 577–578
 lyre 18
 Royal Cemetery 138–141, 143, 149, 482
 Ur III period 194, 199, 217, 272, 281, 322, 324,
 373, 378–379, 546, 555, 558, 570, 575–580,
 584, 590
 Urtian 48–49
 Urtu 48, 80
 urban, urbanism 271, 278, 295–297, 314–315
 Ur-Namma, stele 578, 589, 589–590
 Uruk (Warka) 295–301, 303–305, 307–308,
 311, 314–315, 453, 455, 466, 545, 549–562,
 575
 URU-KA-gina 192–193

- ut pictura poesis 245
- Utāna 497
- utilitarian 267
- Utu 378

- vassal treaties of Esarhaddon 241, 258
- version 266, 270, 282, 287
- Vetulonia 93
- Victory Stele of Naram-Sin (*see* Naram-Sin)
- Vidafarnah 497
- Vidarna 497
- virtuosity 601, 611
- visual (corpora), visual arts 267–268
- votive (*see also* statuary/statues) 278–279, 598–600, 605, 612

- wall paintings 55–57, 63, 66–68, 71–75, 690, 693, 698
- warfare 619–620, 622–623, 626–627, 629, 637–638
- Warka vase 253–254, 281
- Wassit 26
- Webb, Jennifer 222, 224
- Wê-ila 381
- well relief, Assur 588
- Weltanschauung* 271

- Wickhoff 280–281
- Winckelmann, Johann Joachim 244
- wine 482, 505
- wine carrier 494
- winged disk 351–352, 362, 364
- winged ring/disk 502
- Winter, Irene 136–138, 143, 145, 148–152
- wooden rollers 214, 219, 221–222, 227
- woodworkers 268
- workshop 111–128, 148, 482, 488–489
 - palace 269
 - temple 269
- writing 265–266, 271, 274, 276, 278–279
 - origins of 295–301, 303, 312–315

- Xerxes 497, 508

- Yaba/Banitu 395
- Yahweh 242–243

- Zabalam 556–557
- Zagros 579
- Zimakka 493
- Zimrilim, king of Mari 580, 582
- Ziššawīš 487, 491, 493–494, 496, 500–507
- Ziwiye 34, 42